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By

Brenda Lang Hellyer

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**The Treatise Committee for Brenda Lang Hellyer certifies that this is
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**AN INSTITUTIONAL FOCUS ON STUDENT LEARNING AND ATTAINMENT:
A CASE STUDY OF TALLAHASSEE COMMUNITY COLLEGE**

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**AN INSTITUTIONAL FOCUS ON STUDENT LEARNING AND ATTAINMENT:
A CASE STUDY OF TALLAHASSEE COMMUNITY COLLEGE**

by

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Treatise

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DEDICATION

For Rusty, a wonderful husband, encourager, comedian, and lifelong partner, your love
and support were the anchors of reality...

and

for Reilly, Zane, and Madison, your innocence, smiles, and need to play, gave me the
spark to push harder and faster. May you always feel the love that you bring to so many
lives and may you always be joyful and achieve your dreams!

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As I reflect on the past two years, my thoughts jump from a variety of “ah hah” moments, insights learned from national community college leaders, visits at best practice college, and countless words of encouragement. Completing this doctorate was an adventure, and one that I would never trade. It was definitely an undertaking that was not done in isolation or single-handedly, but rather it was done with the support and prayers of family, friends, and colleagues. And I thank each and every one of them!

To my husband, Rusty, I gratefully thank him for his patience and love, and continuous encouragement. Not only did he dedicate our financial resources to this endeavor, but he took on all those duties that I no longer had time to cover, and he significantly changed his business ventures to accommodate our part-time relocation to Austin. And even more importantly, he became the major caretaker of Reilly, our blessing that arrived just a few short months into the program. I am lucky to have found this man!

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reading, but Mommy/B-Ma is back now and ready to have fun. For each of them, I hope I have demonstrated the importance of love, lifelong learning, compassion, joy, and perseverance. They must remember to dream and know that their dreams are achievable!

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happened with the members of Block 63. To the Block (Andrew, Angie, Christy, Danette, Elise, Jason, Karla, Kerry, Linda, Melinda, and Paul), we had our moments of storming, norming, and forming, but I never could have been prouder or more honored to work with such a talented, diverse, and passionate group. I offer sincere appreciation to each member of the Block. I know that each will be successful in achieving his/her dreams, and their leadership will help to change lives. Knowing each of them has changed mine for the better.

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or interest to me and my work. And to Dr. Walter Bumphus, he too served as a mentor and advisor during my time at the CCLP and as a member of my treatise committee. He offered countless hours of encouragement, advice, and mentoring for which I am thankful. I am also grateful for those insightful conversations allowing me to weigh multiple options with realism and caution.

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Trustees, administrators, faculty, staff, and students; and I am forever grateful to all of those who participated and contributed to this study. Without their guidance, support, cooperation, and openness, my work could not have been completed.

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**AN INSTITUTIONAL FOCUS ON STUDENT LEARNING AND ATTAINMENT:
A CASE STUDY OF TALLAHASSEE COMMUNITY COLLEGE**

Publication No. _____

Brenda Lang Hellyer, Ed.D.

The University of Texas at Austin, 2009

Supervisor: John E. Roueche

The overarching goals of this study were twofold: first, to learn how community colleges are preparing students to flourish and contribute to a changing and global economy, and second, how they address those students that do not make it through the community college. Within this context, the researcher elected to perform a case study of Tallahassee Community College (TCC), a college identified as focused on improving student success and empowering students to reach their goals; and, committed to sharing data and information across and throughout the institution. To achieve its ultimate goals, this study had four specific purposes. First, it provided an in-depth account of the development and implementation of the organizational vision and student success

(learning and attainment) focus at TCC. Second, the study examined how the use of data provided transparency and redirected the focus of TCC. Third, it examined how TCC's student learning portal is used by students, faculty, staff, administrators, and the board of trustees. Finally, it considered how the findings may inform policy makers, institutional leaders, and researchers about key factors impacting a student success focus. Taken in concert, the study was designed to provide a contextual framework for implementing an organizational vision focused on improving student success.

The study is a qualitative research designed case study informed by quantitative data. The study included TCC serving as the unit of analysis for the entire case, and the student learning portal serving as the unit of analysis for an embedded case study. Qualitative methods employed included documents, archival records, interviews, focus groups, and direct observations. Multiple approaches were used to present the case study including a chronology of key historical events and a categorical or topical format based on an inductive analysis of data. Eight themes emerged as contributing to the work of the student success agenda: 1) leadership style of the president and the board relationship, 2) the vision for student success, 3) transparency and open communications, 4) strategic plan, 5) budget, 6) data and information technology, 7) people and development, and 8) sustainability of the shared vision.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Background

In *Embracing the Tiger*, the authors reference an observation from Winston Churchill whereby “the world’s dictators were riding to and fro on the backs of tigers from which they dared not dismount and that the tigers were getting hungry” (Roueche, Johnson, Roueche, & Associates, 1997, preface). The authors substituted colleges for dictators and suggested that the metaphor clearly depicted the public dissatisfaction with the higher education system and its results. Eleven years later, public unrest is even more profound with concerns on performance, resource allocation, return on investment, and curriculum alignment; and institutional and educational sector accountability discussions are occurring throughout the country. Interest in redesigning the educational system in America is being generated at national, state, regional, local, and institutional levels.

Adding to this unrest is the assessment by many researchers and authors, including Kirsch, Braun, Yamamoto, and Sum (2007), that the confluence of three forces are placing the United States in a vulnerable competitive position. These forces are the “divergent skill distributions among the U.S. population groups, a changing economy [driven by technological innovation and globalization], and demographic trends of a growing, more diverse population” (Kirsch et al., 2007, pp. 2-3). Each of

these forces offers a unique challenge, and one may have taken the United States by surprise. The National Center on Education and the Economy (2007) conveys that in its first commission report in 1990, it never “dreamed that we would end up competing with countries that could offer large numbers of highly educated workers willing to work for low wages” (p. 4). But this is the situation that is occurring in China and India, and Friedman (2007) describes the phenomenon in India as the specialization of “min[ing] the brains of its own people by educating a relatively large slice of its elites in the sciences, engineering, and medicine” (p. 127). This focus on education has occurred in many countries throughout the world, in just 30 years, “while our international counterparts are increasingly getting more education, [and] their young people are getting a better education as well” (The National Center on Education and the Economy [NCEE], 2007, p. 4), the United States’ percent of the world’s college students has dropped from 30 to nearly 14 and is continuing to decline. According to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development [OECD] (2008), in 2006 the United States ranked twelfth in the higher education attainment among the major industrialized nations. Additionally, Americans are placing anywhere from the middle to the bottom of the pack in mathematics, science, and general literacy in the advanced industrial nations. Not only is the United States experiencing gaps within its own population classes, but also in comparison to world competitors.

Kirsch et al. (2007) references a series of reports over the past twenty years that have pointed towards a failing educational system and its impact on the nation’s

economy. Even more unnerving is O'Banion's (2007) claim that over the past 50 years, at least one reform report on American schooling has been issued annually by a federal or state commission, agency, or prominent leader. The 1993 report entitled *An American Imperative: Higher Expectations for Higher Education* focused on higher education and raised alarms that "a disturbing and dangerous mismatch exists between what American society needs of higher education and what it is receiving" (Wingspread Group on Higher Education [Wingspread], 1993, p. 1).

A more recent reform document, Spellings' *A Test of Leadership: Charting the Future of U.S. Higher Education* (2006), references unfilled educational promises, lack of rigor, and dismal student success. Spellings delineates five expectations for higher education in America. First, is the creation of "new knowledge [that] contributes to economic prosperity and global competitiveness, and empowers citizens" (p. viii). The second expectation is for education to be "accessible to all Americans throughout their lives" (p. viii). Spellings' third demand is that educational institutions provide "high-quality instruction while improving their efficiency in order to be more affordable to the students, taxpayers, and donors who sustain them" (p. viii). The fourth charge is for education to provide "Americans [with] the workplace skills they need to adapt to a rapidly changing economy" (p. viii). Lastly, Spellings asks for adaptability and change readiness in which educational institutions "adapt to a world altered by technology, changing demographics and globalization, in which the higher-education landscape includes new providers and new paradigms, from for-profit universities to distance

learning” (p. viii). In order to achieve these national goals, educational institutions must remain current in technology and curriculum and while meeting the demands for access, affordability, quality, and accountability. This is no small challenge, yet it is critical in light of projections that “ninety percent of the fastest-growing jobs in the new knowledge-driven economy will require some postsecondary education” (Spellings, 2006, p. 1).

Faure (as cited by Gleazer, 1998) is quoted as stating in 1972, “For the first time in history, education is now engaged in preparing men for a type of society which does not yet exist” (p. 14). This statement is perhaps more valid now than it was 36 years ago. Roueche and Jones (2005) state that “changes in the world of higher education are occurring at a dizzying pace” (p. x), and the challenges in “technology, globalization, accountability, recruitment and retention, workforce development, diversity, and accreditation each represent full-time and compelling work” (p. x) for community colleges.

The College Board (2008) released its action agenda for community colleges with the recommendation that “community colleges should recommit themselves to access, success, accountability, and excellence....[and the] two-year college leaders [should] develop new accountability measures that better assess the unique and varied missions of their institutions.” (p. 38). Most would agree that accountability, “the act of being responsible to various publics external to the college for implementation of its mission” (Roueche et al., 1997, p. viii), is not a bad thing. But what to measure, how to

measure it, how to vary those measurements based on the mission of the institution, and what to do when the measurements reflect less than stellar results are the areas of debate. The College Board concluded “without losing their historical commitment to access, community colleges must rededicate themselves to the expectation of student success” (p. 10).

Roueche and Roueche (1999) implore colleges to ask difficult questions and to examine programs and to “achieve a standard of excellence with which an institution and its community can live” (p. 40). And they close the chapter with “how colleges behave now in response to their communities’ intense interest in student success will determine the quality of their existence in the next decade” (Roueche & Roueche, 1999, p. 40). Colleges must change behaviors, redefine business practices and operations, and commit to improving student success while yet maintaining academic excellence. These steps are critical in order for the United States to close the education gap and regain its competitive position.

Statement of the Problem

Issues of global competitiveness, divergent skill distributions among the current and near future workforce, changing demographics, the widening of the gap between rich and poor, the deterioration of the country’s educational standings among other industrialized countries, and the declining rigor and success of educational institutions will have a significant impact on the economic vitality and viability of the United States. Community colleges do and will continue to have a critical role in changing and

reshaping the future of the United States and its citizens. In 2008, community colleges in the United States enrolled more than 11.5 million students with 6.5 million taking credit courses and the remainder for noncredit. Forty-six percent of all undergraduates attend one of the country's 1,195 community colleges. Thirty-nine percent are first generation college students, and 39% are minorities among which the largest groups are Hispanics (15%) and Blacks (13%). Each of these characteristics may place the student under unique challenges, demands, and stresses that can impact their ability to succeed at college. Community colleges must re-evaluate their business practices, vision, and performance. They must no longer focus only on the number of students coming through their doors (enrollment); rather, they must focus on preparing students to exit through those doors as graduates – the ultimate outcome of student success. The focus must be on access with success (American Association of Community Colleges [AACC], 2008).

Context of the Case Study

The researcher was seeking to learn how community colleges are preparing students to flourish in and contribute to a global economy and flat world. Further, she sought to better understand how colleges address those students that do not succeed. Within this context, a case study of the Tallahassee Community College (TCC) was conducted in order to learn from the practices of a highly successful institution. TCC, located in Florida's capital city, is identified as an exemplary institution in improving student success, empowering students to reach their goals, and sharing data and information across and throughout the institution. TCC was featured in the Winter 2008,

Lumina Foundation Lessons publication, under the headline: “Tallahassee Community College: Keeping students’ eyes on the prize – through every lens possible.” The article highlights “the very public way it [TCC] has owned up to shortcomings and mounted efforts to improve student success rates...[and] Law’s [TCC’s President] vision for making a good college even better” (Lumina Foundation for Education, 2008, p. 24).

The researcher’s interest in TCC developed based on additional exposure to its work and commitment to student success. The researcher had the opportunity to hear Dr. William D. Law, Jr., President of TCC, speak on two separate occasions, once on December 3, 2007, at the Community College Leadership Program at The University of Texas at Austin, and the second on March 28, 2008, at the Achieving the Dream 2008 Board of Trustees Institute. Additionally, the researcher has read Dr. Law’s chapter entitled “Tallahassee Community College: Responding to the Challenge of the Internet Age” in *The Creative Community College: Leading Change Through Innovation*. In each of the presentations and in the writing, Dr. Law focused on how an institution must integrate values, culture, and data to improve student success. While Law does not boast about his leadership role in these efforts, Jenkins (2008) elucidates the critical role of Law’s leadership in “adopt[ing] a new emphasis on access **and** success” (p. 31) and encouraging “‘courageous conversations’ that allow them [faculty and staff] to question their ingrained practices and experiment with new approaches” (p. 31).

The case study provided an opportunity to research primary factors at TCC, including leadership, that are contributing to institutional transformation to improve

success for all TCC students, and to examine how the use of data is supporting this process. While the study provides a brief historical background of TCC, the main focus is on the period from Dr. Law's arrival in 2002 through the present. In order to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the key student success initiatives, the researcher developed a framework for principles, values, and philosophies driving the efforts at the institution:

- TCC's vision, mission, values, strategic plan, and guiding principles,
- TCC's role as a first-round Achieving the Dream institution,
- TCC's work under a federal Title III grant focused on expanded development of the student learning portal and individual learning plans, and
- TCC's Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) committed to an early warning system for students in remedial courses.

Purpose of the Study

To achieve its ultimate goals, this study had four specific purposes. First, it provided an in-depth account of the development and implementation of the organizational vision and student success (learning and attainment) focus at Tallahassee Community College (TCC). Second, the study examined how the use of data provided transparency and redirected the focus of TCC. Third, it examined how TCC's student learning portal is being used by students, faculty, staff, administrators, and the board of trustees. Finally, findings may inform policy makers, institutional leaders, and researchers about key factors impacting a student success focus. Taken in concert, the

study was designed to provide a contextual framework for implementing an organizational vision focused on improving student success.

This study was guided by four primary research questions corresponding to the four-fold purpose of the study. The primary research questions and the issue-oriented supplementary questions or sub-questions were as follows:

Research Question 1: What institutional changes and efforts are taking place or have been implemented at TCC to improve student learning and attainment?

- a) What are the shared visions, values, beliefs, or assumptions characterizing the culture of TCC?
- b) How have these changed in the recent years?

Research Question 2: How is data used at TCC to focus on student learning and attainment?

- a) How is student success measured?
- b) How is teaching and learning measured?
- c) What data is collected?
- d) How is that data collected?
- e) What is done with the data that is collected?
- f) How does data impact the decision making process?
- g) How does the use of data make a difference?
- h) What impact has the data had in areas such as operations, budget development, and student outcomes?

Research Question 3: How is the TCC's student learning portal utilized by students, faculty, staff, administrators, and the board of trustees in analyzing and monitoring the progress on student learning and attainment?

Research Question 4: How can the work at TCC inform policy makers, institutional leaders, and researchers regarding key factors impacting a student success focus?

Definition of Key Terms

In order to provide a foundation for guiding and informing the reader, the following key terms are defined. These definitions are meant to clarify and facilitate an understanding within the context of this paper and are not intended to be definitive.

Accountability. Accountability is the “act of being responsible to various publics external to the college for implementation of its mission” (Roueche et al., 1997, p. viii).

Assessment. The concept of assessment “expands the effectiveness strategy by determining the degree to which the college is meeting preset performance standards” Roueche, et al., 1997, p. viii).

Cohort. “A cohort is a group of people studied over time. The individuals in the group have at least one statistical factor – such as when they started college – in common” (Achieving the Dream [ATD], 2006, p. 1).

Effectiveness. Effectiveness is explained by Alfred, Shults, & Seybert (2007), as “a construct involving multiple constituencies that hold specific (and sometimes conflicting expectations) about what a college should be doing and the results it should produce” (p. 9). Alfred et al. explain that “the challenge is to deliver value and to measure performance in ways that are meaningful to different groups” (p. vii), and “colleges must produce results efficiently...within the constraints of available resources” (p. 10).

Institutional Effectiveness. Institutional effectiveness is “an internal strategy for planning and evaluation that generates data by which the college can determine if it is matching its performance to its purpose” (Roueche et al., 1997, p. viii). The

significance of institutional effectiveness is expanded upon as “the engine that propels colleges toward identifying appropriate assessment strategies that, through implementation, will provide viable and sufficient evidence of institutional accountability” (Roueche et al., 1997, p. viii).

Assumptions

For purposes of this study, the assumptions developed by Margaretta Mathis in her 2006 dissertation based on a case study of The Community College of Baltimore County are relevant to this researcher. The nine assumptions developed by Mathis and used with approval by the author are as follows:

- 1) Rapid technology advances and socioeconomic transformation will contribute to a continued demand for a skilled workforce that is adept at working successfully with a global, high-technology, multicultural society;
- 2) Enrollment will continue to rise, comprised of an increasingly multicultural student population, many who are anticipated to be underprepared for higher education;
- 3) Community college students, including transitional and incumbent workers, will have increased need for developmental education, social support, and language proficiency courses;
- 4) State funding shortfalls will continue in the foreseeable future necessitating community colleges to compete for scarce resources;
- 5) Educational institutions will need to develop curricula, strategies, assessments, and cultures that are adaptive to the needs of a diverse student population;
- 6) Educational institutions will need to retain open and flexible systems and create strategic alliances adroit at being responsive and anticipatory of global economic shifts, societal demands, and student, workforce, community, and employer needs;

- 7) To survive, thrive, and be competitive, community colleges will need to align competencies with industry/international standards and harmonized assessments;
- 8) Demands for accountability and measurable learning outcomes will continue; and,
- 9) Improved student outcomes and the success of all students is [are] desired.

(Mathis, 2006, p. 26)

Limitations of the Study

The research for this study was primarily based on an analysis of literature and information drawn from Tallahassee Community College (TCC) including documentation, archival records, interviews, focus groups, and direct observations (Yin, 2003). This study is based on a single entity, which leads one to question the transferability or the generalization of the study. The goal is not to represent a sample, but rather “by concentrating on a single phenomenon or entity (the case), the researcher aims to uncover the interaction of significant factors characteristic of the phenomenon. The case study focuses on holistic description and explanation” (Merriam, 2001, p. 29).

Chapter Summary

Shifts in the economy, technology, and demographics offer unique challenges and pressures to higher education. The focus is no longer on enrollment, but rather on student success and performance. Community colleges have a significant role in meeting this formidable challenge due to their substantial enrollments. Furthermore, the students enrolled in community colleges are confronted with unique characteristics including first generation college students, minorities, underprepared students, and individuals in need

of financial assistance. Never before has a student success focus been more critical, and such a focus should permeate all decisions made at community colleges. It was, therefore, the intent of this treatise to research how one community college, Tallahassee Community College, is attempting to address the issue of student success.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Introduction

This chapter is intended to provide the reader with a review of literature that informed this study. The areas of literature reviewed correlated to the four specific purposes of the study. First, it provided an in-depth account of the development and implementation of the organizational vision and student success (learning and attainment) focus at Tallahassee Community College (TCC). Second, the study examined how the use of data provided transparency and redirected the focus of TCC. Third, it examined how the TCC's student learning portal is being used by students, faculty, staff, administrators, and the board of trustees. Finally, findings may inform policy makers, institutional leaders, and researchers about key factors impacting student success. Taken in concert, the study was designed to provide a contextual framework for implementing an organizational vision focused on improving student success.

This chapter begins with a historical overview of community colleges and the environmental context of education at both a national and state level. It continues with a review of the relationship between data, evidence, accountability, and student success. The next section examines the impact of leadership, shared vision, and values on an organization. Finally, three frameworks, the learning college concept, the Seven Principles of Good Practice in Undergraduate Education, and the Achieving the Dream: Community Colleges Count initiative, were examined.

The History of Community Colleges

In 1901, Joliet Junior College was established as the first community college under the direction of Dr. William Rainey Harper, President of the University of Chicago. The college courses offered were initially combined with those of the Joliet high school (Vaughan, 2006, p. 36). Following this inauguration, community leaders across the United States began establishing community colleges in order to provide an option for local students to stay close to home to pursue their higher education and vocational training (Smith, 2000, p. 2). Depending on the state, community colleges were established as branch campuses by the university system or as an extension to the high school, and therefore, part of secondary education (Smith, 2000, p.2; Lovell & Trough, 2002, p. 93). No matter the progenitor, leadership from the local community was usually the deciding force in identifying the need for a community college. During these early years, community colleges were normally part of the university or public school system that started them.

In general, the enrollments in higher education were impelled after World War II with the Servicemen's Readjustment Act, more commonly known as the GI Bill that provided financial assistance to returning military personnel. The growth and independence of community colleges was spurred in 1947 with President Harry Truman's Commission on Higher Education which called for the establishment of community colleges throughout the nation in order to provide avenues for doubling the number of people pursuing higher education without regards "to race, sex, religion,

color, geographical location, or financial status” (Roueche, Baker, OmahaBoy, & Mullins, 1987, p. 4). Significant growth in community colleges continued through the 1960s with nearly 500 created during the decade. The growth slowed through the 1980s and has since leveled off with 1,195 community colleges in the country serving an enrollment of 11.5 million students, including 46% of the undergraduates in the country and 41% of first-time freshmen. Additionally, these community college students are highly diverse with an average age of 29, part-time enrollment at 59%, and a minority enrollment of 39%. Another important attribute of community college enrollments is that 39% are first generation college students. Each of these characteristics places the student under unique challenges, demands, and stresses (AACC, 2008; Roueche et al., 1987; Vaughn, 2006).

Gleazer (1998) provides a synthesis of the mission of community colleges is “to encourage and facilitate lifelong learning, with community as process and product” (p. 16). While this statement emphasizes that the focus is dependent on the needs of the local community being served, the major theme for all community colleges has been on access. This theme is based on the principles that “higher education was the right of any person who could profit from it...[, it] embodies the ideas that education is essential to maintaining a democracy and improving society, and that education is key to equalizing opportunity for all citizens” (Roueche, Ely, & Roueche, 2001, p. 11). And many have referred to community colleges as ‘democracy’s college,’ ‘opportunity college,’ and ‘the people’s college.’

While open access means open admissions, it also denotes serving diverse populations where “men and women from all ethnic, social, and economic backgrounds can afford to attend the community college and that no one is discriminated against” (Vaughan, 2006, p. 4). Additionally, access represents options but “does not mean that anyone can enter any program without the appropriate competencies required for effective learning... [but rather] the community college offers avenues for students to obtain the necessary prerequisites” (Vaughan, 2006, pp. 4-5). Tied directly to this option is the need for community colleges to be comprehensive, providing students with choices in programs, course offerings, instructional modalities, exit options (transfer, degrees, certificates, and multiple re-enter points). But some have suggested that community colleges are faced with a dilemma, “the problem of providing open access with quality” (Roueche, et al., 1987, p. 4).

The Environmental Context Surrounding Education

National Environment

O'Banion (2007) claims that over the past 50 years, at least one annual reform report on American education has been issued by a federal or state commission, agency, or prominent leader. Over the past twenty-five years, the reports, studies, and monographs pointing towards a failing educational system and its impact on the nation's economy have increased tremendously. The 1983 U.S. Department of Education report, *A Nation at Risk*, addressed the mediocrity of public education, and it may be the report that turned the tide and gained significant momentum when it identified that ‘Johnny

could not read'. This report revealed that, "about 13% of 17-year-olds were functionally illiterate, SAT scores were dropping, and students needed an increased array of remedial courses in college" (U.S. Department of Education, 2008, p.1). The 1993 report entitled *An American Imperative: Higher Expectations for Higher Education* focused on higher education and raised alarms that "a disturbing and dangerous mismatch exists between what American society needs of higher education and what it is receiving" (Wingspread, 1993, p. 1).

A more recent reform document, Spellings' *A Test of Leadership: Charting the Future of U.S. Higher Education* (2006), references unfilled educational promises, lack of rigor, and dismal student success. In her report, U.S. Secretary Margaret Spellings submits that some of the issues that led education to this point are "increasingly dysfunctional" and are associated with inequities in affordability, broadening accessibility gaps, bureaucratic inefficiencies, signals of declining quality, slowness to implement innovations, and inadequate accountability measurements (Kirsch et al., 2007; NCEE, 2007). Her conclusions are supported by Greene and Forster (2003) who analyzed data from the U.S. Department of Education for the high school class of 2001; they estimate that only 70% of students in public high schools graduate and only 32% leave "college ready" (p.1). Additionally, the most recent data available from the National Center for Education Statistics reflects that only 35% of students who entered four-year colleges seeking a bachelor's degree in 1998 had earned their degree four

years later, and only 56% had graduated six years later (Knapp, Kelly-Reid, & Whitmore, 2006).

These trends are especially alarming as other countries outpace the United States in educational attainment and success: ranking sixth in the percentage of 20 to 24 year-olds with high school credentials; fifth in the percentage of 18 to 24 year-olds enrolled in college, twelfth in the higher education attainment, and anywhere from the middle to the bottom of the pack in mathematics, science, and general literacy (Davies, 2006; OECD, 2008) in the advanced industrial nations. In *Tough Choices or Tough Times*, the National Center on Education and the Economy (2007) stated, “If we [the United States] continue on our current course, and the number of nations outpacing us in the education race continues to grow at its current rate, the American standard of living will steadily fall relative to those nations, rich and poor, that are doing a better job” (p. 8). Even more alarming is Davies’ (2006) conclusion, “...while other nations are making significant gains in educating their populations, educational achievement in the United States has stagnated over the last two decades....[T]he educational advancement of other nations compared with the United States may change both the way we live and the freedoms we enjoy” (p. 1).

State Environment

These national trends are directly linked to actions being taken at the state level whereby most states are focusing more on their educational systems. For example, in a policy brief prepared for the Education Commission of the States, Krueger (2006)

reports that 30 states were engaged in some type of P-16 (pre-kindergarten to grade 16) activity in 2006. While the specific activities of the P-16 groups or councils vary, the goal is the same:

to create [a] system of education which begins in early childhood and ends after college that promotes access, standards, accountability, and life-long learning. Other common goals include smoothing the transition from high school to college, improving teacher quality, reducing remediation, and raising student achievement across all educational levels. (Krueger, 2006, p. 1)

Krueger and Rainwater (2003) define the ultimate goal from a P-16 education as “provid[ing] every student with the skills and knowledge they need to succeed as citizens and workers” (p. 5).

The National Conference of State Legislatures (2006) formed the Blue Ribbon Commission on Higher Education, a bipartisan group of legislators brought together to study and debate “the challenges facing states, students and institutions, and the role of the legislature in creating some of these problems and in leading to solutions for the future” (p. 1). Their final report, issued in 2006 after 18 months of work, highlights successful programs and actions taken in over a dozen states, but their final recommendations are based on the “need for legislative leadership” (p. 3) including being proactive versus reactive and “mak[ing] higher education a priority for your state legislature [and] rethink[ing] higher education policy as part of state economic development” (p. 3).

Data, Evidence, Accountability, and Success

Morest and Jenkins (2007) succinctly explain the influences that have helped to focus numerous constituents on the topics of data, evidence, accountability, and success:

Federal and state governments are pressing colleges to provide more data demonstrating evidence of student outcomes and institutional performance. Accreditation agencies are also asking colleges to provide evidence of student learning and achievement, and they want colleges to establish systems of institutional self-assessment to produce such evidence. The desire for more data and better analysis is also influenced by a growing enthusiasm among educators and advocates to use data to guide decisions about college management and about the design of college programs and services. This notion holds that data should be used not only for the purpose of accountability, but also for the explicit purpose of improving student outcomes and institutional performance. (p. 2)

While Morest and Jenkins (2007) explain the current pressures surrounding evidence and accountability, Roueche, Baker, and Brownell (1971) addressed the concept more than three decades ago. They stated, “Accountability is far more than a glib term or ‘in’ word. It is an operational concept...Accountability is a privilege – not a burden” (Roueche et al., 1971, p. 8). They defined the four essential characteristics of accountability as follows:

- 1) Accountability accents results “aim[ed] squarely at what comes out of an education system rather than at what goes into it...Teaching causes learning. If no learning occurs, no teaching has taken place!” (pp. 6-7).
- 2) Accountability requires measurement thus rather than “counting the number of volumes in the library...[or] measuring square feet per full-time student...[we must] start looking at how well students are being taught” (p. 7) using relevant criteria, objectives, and measurement techniques.
- 3) Accountability assumes and shifts primary responsibility for learning from the student to the school.

- 4) Accountability permeates the college community beginning with the board and president and cascading down to “the administration, the students, and the instructors...[with all] accountable to the community served by the college” (p. 8).

While controversial at its time, this explanation of accountability has clearly reached its time. Alfred et al. (2007) explain that “the challenge is to deliver value and to measure performance in ways that are meaningful to different groups” (p. vii), and “colleges must produce results efficiently...within the constraints of available resources” (p. 10). Furthermore, boundaries must be set as to “what to assess and why” (p. 11) rather than measuring everything.

The dynamics of smart use of data are complex, and few appear to have mastered the task. The complexities include the need for multiple measures as Ewell (2006) describes, “Academic quality is complex and elusive, no single piece of evidence tells the whole story” (p. xii). But the complexities also relate to understanding how the data will be used. While there are growing demands for accountability measures, there is also an “increasing recognition of the value of evidence [data] on student progression for improving programs and services” (Morest & Jenkins, 2007, p. 4). Using data in this manner to drive change may result in improved student outcomes and institutional performance.

For an organization to make the move to becoming data informed, it must first establish a culture of evidence. This is difficult work because it requires that past assumptions and anecdotes be questioned. The data may indicate that past perceptions

may not be supported, but rather poorer performance or trends may emerge. It is important during this time of revelation that two messages be continuously communicated: “data are our friends...[and] look behind the numbers” (Community College Survey of Student Engagement [CCSSE], n.d., p. 7).

In an organization focused on student success, the president must create an expectation for that culture of evidence beginning with the Board of Trustees and cascading down to the faculty and staff. The president must define, effectively communicate, and get others to embrace a shared vision of student success; create an environment of trust and respect; build relationships at all levels within and outside the organization; and must be held accountable for performance of the institution (Boggs, 2006; Jensen & Giles, 2006; Smith, 2000).

The Learning College Framework

O’Banion (2007) describes the traditional structure of education in America from a historical perspective that served first, the needs of an agrarian economy and then the industrial revolution. While the agrarian calendar remained the foundation, the organizational models of the industrial economy became those used in the structure of education. Models, such as Frederick Taylor’s scientific management theory focusing on task design and motion studies and Max Weber’s bureaucratic structure rooted in hierarchical offices and disciplined procedures, impacted the design of class sizes, length of periods and terms, and the use of the school bell. (Bolman & Deal, 1997; O’Banion, 2007; Sashkin, 1981).

These structures, according to O'Banion (2007), have resulted in the educational system being defined in terms of boundaries,

The school system, from K to Gray, is time-bound, place-bound, bureaucracy-bound, and role-bound. These bounds must be broken and a new, more fluid architecture [must be] created that places learning first and enables the institution to become even smarter and better at improving its outcomes. (p. 715)

Barr and Tagg (1995) contrasted these boundaries in terms of paradigms, instruction versus learning. "In the Instruction Paradigm, a specific methodology determines the boundary of what colleges can do; in the Learning Paradigm, student learning and success set the boundary" (Barr & Tagg, 1995, p. 13).

According to O'Banion (1997), the focus should be "to place learning front and center in the educational enterprise" (p. xvi). He references *The American Imperative* published in 1993 which calls for:

redesigning our learning systems to align with our entire educational enterprise with the personal, civic, and work place needs of the 21st century...[and to] put learning at the heart of the academic enterprise will mean overhauling the conceptual, procedural, curricular, and other architecture of post secondary education on most campuses. (O'Banion, 1997, p. xiv; Wingspread, 1993, p. 14 & p. 19)

"This new wave of reform is not tweaking a system to fix a few broken parts, it is a fundamental overhaul, destruction of much that is traditional and construction of much that is new" (O'Banion, 1997, p. xiv).

According to O'Banion (1997), "resistance to change is a hallmark of higher education. It has been said that changing a college is a lot like moving a cemetery – you don't get a lot of help from the residents...educational bureaucrats, faculty,

administrators, students, and parents” (p. 28). But O’Banion focuses on the economic and demographic pressures that continue to substantiate the imperative for change in the higher education model. Eckel (2000) further substantiates the imperative: “as environments continue to change and institutions face more complicated and intense challenges, the demands...to act and to act quickly and in ways beneficial to the institution will increase...” (p. 16).

O’Banion (1997) recognizes that community colleges are national leaders at improving the traditional system, but he argues that even for community colleges, a new model is needed. One “that incorporates the best practices and philosophies of its past with the expanding base of new knowledge about learning and technology (O’Banion, 1997, p. 47). He defines the learning college as “a model tailor-made for the community college and one that holds great promise for helping students make passionate connections to learning” (p. 47).

The concept of a learning college is centered at all times on what is best for the student or learner (O’Banion, 1997, 2007). “educational experiences are designed for the convenience of learners rather than for the convenience of institutions and their staffs” (O’Banion, 1997, p. 47). The six key principles of the learning college model are: (1) creation of substantive change in individual learners; 2) engagement of learners as full partners in the learning process with responsibility for their own choices; 3) offering of many learning options; 4) collaborative learning activities; 5) the needs of learners are focal; and 6) the definition of success is data-driven based on improved and expanded

learning (O'Banion, 1997). These principles guide the focus on defining, assessing, measuring, and documenting learning outcomes and successes (CCSSE, n.d; League for Innovation in the Community College [League], 2008; Mathis, 2006; O'Banion, 1997, 2007; Roueche et al., 2001; Troyer, 2005).

The Seven Principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Education Framework

In 1999, Chickering and Gamson reflected on why they developed the rubric of Seven Principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Education in 1986. They attributed it to the “concern for improving undergraduate education [that] has been unrelenting in the second half of the twentieth century...an undergraduate reform movement that appeared to be sweeping the country” (Chickering & Gamson, 1999, pp. 75-76). They also feared that their research work and that of others on good teaching and learning in colleges “would not reach the faculty, administrators, and students to whom they were targeted” (p. 75). To this regard, they obtained sponsorship from the American Association for Higher Education, Johnson Foundation, and Lilly Endowment for a task force of scholars to develop a statement of principles that were “accessible, understandable, practical, and widely applicable” (p. 76).

From that work in 1986, they concluded in Chickering and Gamson (1987) that undergraduate education could not be improved “without the commitment and action of students and faculty members” (p. 3). They offered the seven principles to focus the work of colleges, administrators, faculty, and students on improvement, but they presented the caveat that support from state agencies and trustees were required also.

Chickering and Gamson stressed the importance of realizing that good practice at institutions varies and “depends very much on their students and their circumstances” (p. 4); and furthermore, the principles are addressing the “teacher’s *how*, not the subject matter *what*” (p. 4). They also underscore that an undergraduate education is more than books and degree plans, but rather “should prepare students to understand and deal intelligently with modern life” (p. 4).

While each of the principles can stand individually, the effects are much stronger when all are present together. The principles of good practice (Chickering & Gamson, 1987) are bolded below and a brief explanation follows:

- 1) **Encourages contacts between students and faculty.** This principle is based on the conclusion that “frequent student-faculty contact in and out of classes is the most important factor in student motivation and involvement” (p. 4). Such contacts allow the student to know that someone cares during difficult times, augments intellectual commitment, and encourages a focus on values and the future.
- 2) **Develops reciprocity and cooperation among students.** This principle is grounded in collaboration and social interaction with “learning is enhanced when it more like a team effort than a solo race” (p. 4). The focus is on increasing involvement in learning by sharing ideas and responding to others’ responses. Learning communities and learning groups are two examples of how this principle can be put into action.
- 3) **Uses active learning techniques.** This principle builds on action and engagement rather than just listening to lectures and memorizing data. “Learning is not a spectator sport...[but rather] they must make what learn they part of themselves” (p. 5). This includes talking, writing, relating, and applying it with

“structured exercises, challenging discussions, team projects, and peer critiques” (p. 5).

- 4) **Gives prompt feedback.** The foundation of this principle is that “knowing what you know and don’t know focuses learning” (p. 5). Appropriate and frequent feedback with suggestions for improvement are needed for students to assess what they know and reflect on what they have learned or still need to learn.
- 5) **Emphasizes time on task.** Simply put, “time plus energy equals learning” (p. 5). This principle encourages institutions to define time expectations related to high performance for students, faculty, and all employees within the institution. Learning time management is critical for all, and students may need assistance in learning effective time management skills and applications. “Allocating realistic amounts of time means effective learning for students and effective teaching for faculty” (p. 5).
- 6) **Communicates high expectations.** This principle is based on high expectations translate into a self-fulfilling prophecy for everyone. This includes not only those that are well prepared and motivated, but also those who are “poorly prepared...[or] unwilling to exert themselves” (p.5). The bottom line is “expect more and you will get more” (p. 5).
- 7) **Respects diverse talents and ways of learning.** This principle recognizes that there are many ways to learn, and “people bring different talents and styles of learning to college” (p. 6). An understanding of personalized and individualized approaches provides the opportunity for students to “show their talents and learn in ways that work for them” (p. 6). Examples under this category include individualized degree programs, contract learning, and personalized systems of instructions that are self-paced.

While Chickering and Gamson’s work placed the responsibility for improving undergraduate education on students and teachers, they also addressed the need for

establishing the a favorable environment to allow the principles to flourish. Among those are a shared sense of purpose, concrete support from leaders, adequate funding, the creation of professional development opportunities, policies and procedures that are consistent with the purpose, and a continuous review of progress.

Achieving the Dream Framework

The Achieving the Dream: Community Colleges Count initiative (Achieving the Dream), is a national multiyear initiative that provides grants to educational institutions to improve student success, particularly for students of color and low-income students. The initiative which asks “colleges to focus on a student-centered vision, build a culture of evidence, and promote the twin goals of equity and excellence” (Achieving the Dream [ATD], 2008, p. 2) was co-designed in 2003 by the Lumina Foundation for Education (Lumina) and eight national partners. Since then, 18 additional funders have invested in the initiative in order to expand it to 79 community colleges and four universities spread across 15 states.

The Achieving the Dream model is focused around the continuous improvement model or more specifically, the four principles of institutional improvement and the five-step institutional improvement process. The principles are considered the basis for creating a culture of evidence, and they require committed leadership, the use of evidence to improve programs and services, broad engagement, and systemic institutional improvement. The principles for institutional improvement are implemented through a five-step process. The process steps are: 1) commit to improving student

outcomes, 2) identify and prioritize problems, 3) engage stakeholders in developing strategies for addressing priority problems, 4) implement, evaluate, and improve strategies, and 5) institutionalize effective policies and practices. The process is continually repeated in order to achieve on-going improvements in student success (Achieving the Dream, 2007).

With a concentration on community colleges, “Achieving the Dream’s student-centered vision is focused on creating a culture of evidence...in which data and evidence drive broad-based institutional efforts to improve student outcomes” (Gordon & Wall, 2008, p.1). Institutions participating in Achieving the Dream collect longitudinal cohort data on their students including courses attempts, grades received, and programs completed. Particular attention is paid to completion rates in developmental and gatekeeper courses, progress from developmental to college-level courses, retention rates, persistence rates, grade point averages, and graduation rates including completion of certificates and degrees. An important component of the data analysis is disaggregation by a variety of criteria including ethnicity, age, gender, financial need, and part-time versus full-time in order to determine achievement gaps among groups (ATD, 2006, 2008; Gordon & Wall, 2008; Morest & Jenkins, 2007).

Based on a clear understanding of the data, colleges “chart student progress over time and identify points where some students tend to struggle or leave college entirely. Colleges can then develop strategies to improve student progress based on a clear diagnosis of the challenges that are present” (Morest & Jenkins, 2007, p. 2). Such an

undertaking creates the necessity for the institution to “recognize and accept the legitimacy of internal research findings about student progress. Achieving the Dream recognizes the need for organizational transformation in creating such a climate and calls for college leaders to help nurture a ‘culture of evidence’” (Morest & Jenkins, 2007, p. 2).

Recognizing the difficulty in transforming an organization, Achieving the Dream institutions are provided extensive support on “collecting and analyzing student data; in designing, implementing, and evaluating intervention strategies; and in broadening knowledge among stakeholders about policies and programs that contribute to student success” (Gordon & Wall, 2008, p. 1). An example of such support is the assignment of two resource personnel, a coach and data facilitator, who function in an advisory and support role and provide feedback on the institution’s progress. The coach, who is normally a retired college president, works with the president, the college’s leadership team, and other institution defined work groups such as instructional delivery teams, student enrollment groups, and the faculty association to critically examine data, clarify questions, examine beliefs and assumptions, engage stakeholders, provide guidance, and assist in building institutional capacity. The data facilitator is usually an institutional researcher and provides assistance and guidance in developing definitions, gathering data, and interpreting the collected information (Gordon & Wall, 2008; Morest & Jenkins, 2007).

Another key component of the Achieving the Dream institutional change model is the engagement of governing boards in the initiative. Their involvement includes signing a commitment letter at the inception of the initiative and annual attendance of the board chair, vice chair, and president at a two and one-half day work session to review institutional data, best practices, and determine future strategic focus and actions. Trustees are encouraged to:

- link governance to learning and sustainability by designating specific time on the agenda for such discussions;
- develop learning-centered and sustainability policies;
- integrate learning outcomes and sustainability into local and national college initiatives;
- create learning-centered and sustainability vision statements;
- establish professional development training programs (McPhail, Dobbins, & Womack, n.d.).

Many of the challenges faced by community colleges seeking to improve the performance of their students are outside of the institutions' ability to shape directly. For example, tuition affordability is dramatically affected by the willingness of the state to provide adequate funding to its community colleges. Another goal of Achieving the Dream is to leverage successes of its member institutions to impact policy decisions at the federal and state levels, and thus improve community college education for all students. The policy agenda focuses on "mak[ing] success of underprepared community college students an explicit policy goal" (Jobs for the Future [Jobs], 2005, p. 2); "creating a policy culture that makes routine use of evidence from a rich student-

outcomes data system....” (Jobs, 2005, p. 2); and “identify[ing] and implement[ing] specific policy changes that promote improved outcomes for underprepared students....” (Jobs, 2005, p. 2).

While the student success agenda driving the Achieving the Dream initiative is clear and compelling in light of “national issues of global competitiveness, workforce development, and a moral imperative to improve the education of all citizens” (Gordon & Wall, 2008, p. 1), the methodologies are still being clarified and the efforts are still being organized. The sustainability and expansion of the model from 15 states to the entire nation is unclear, but many suggest that Achieving the Dream has “‘changed the conversation’ by driving student success to the top of the national community college change agenda” (Gordon & Wall, 2008, p. 7). Dr. Byron McClenney, a community college leader with more than 35 years of experience as a chief executive officer, concluded that Achieving the Dream is considered the “single most significant effort ever taken” for student success and the “greatest project in the history for community colleges” (personal communication, October 24, 2007).

Leadership, Shared Vision, and Values

Leadership

The mysteries surrounding the ‘true’ definition of leadership and leadership effectiveness are numerous. Stogdill (1974) concluded that ‘there are almost as many definitions of leadership as there are persons who have attempted to define the concept’ (p. 259), and the accumulation of definitions have continued to amass. Yukl (2006)

compared leadership definitions over a 50-year period and concluded that the common factor is that most “reflect the assumption that it [leadership] involves a process whereby intentional influence is exerted by one person over other people to guide, structure, and facilitate activities and relationships in a group or organization” (p. 3).

Burns (1978) suggests that leadership is meaningless without its connection to common purposes and collective needs. He defines leadership as “leaders inducing followers to act for certain goals that represent the values and the motivations – the wants and needs, the aspirations and expectations – *of both leaders and followers*” (p. 19). Burns goes a step further and contrasts two types of leadership: transactional leadership and transformational leadership. The differences between the two are largely characterized by the relationship between the leaders and followers. Transactional “leaders approach followers with an eye to exchanging one thing for another” (p. 4) and each party “is conscious of the power resources and attitudes of the other” (p. 19). In contrast, transformational leadership, which “occurs when one or more persons engage with others in such a way that leaders and followers raise one another to higher levels of motivation and morality” (p. 20).

Gleazer (1998) addresses these same concepts as differences between a leader and a manager that are impacted by the perspective that exists between various constituency groups (i.e. legislatures, faculty, board members, etc.). Gleazer is critical of the manager model whereby there is a lack of leadership. He stressed the importance of having leaders and thinkers (p. 160). Gleazer asserts, “There is a need for leadership – to

point the way *and* management, ‘to have charge of and administer’” (p. 164). He stresses the need to move people towards clear objectives, and the leader is the one that needs to give visibility and direction in these areas. But he cautions that “we need to give more attention to ‘leadership’ – but not less attention to management” (p. 164) in order to have effective operations – both are part of the equation.

Collin’s (2001) study of 11 good-to-great companies found a common denominator in leadership that he defined as ‘Level 5 leaders’, which are leaders that have reached the “highest level in a hierarchy of executive capabilities” (p. 21). Characteristics of a Level 5 leader are described “as an individual who blends extreme personal humility with intense professional will...they are incredibly ambitious –*but their ambition is first and foremost for the institution, not themselves*” (p. 21). Level 5 leaders are contrasted with effective Level 4 leaders; Level 5 leaders are ones who “set up their successors for even greater success in the next generation, whereas egocentric Level 4 leaders often set up their successors for failure” (p. 39). Collins’ concludes that Level 5 leaders are not as uncommon as one might think rather we should “look for situations where extraordinary results exist but where no individual steps forth to claim excess credit. You will likely find a potential Level 5 leader at work” (p. 37).

These concepts are consistent with the definition coined by Roueche, Baker, and Rose (1989) to characterize leadership demonstrated and required at community colleges across the country; “the ability to influence, shape, and embed values, attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors consistent with increased staff and faculty commitment to the unique

mission of the community college” (p. 18). Furthermore, Roueche and Roueche in *The Art of Visionary Leadership: Painting a Face on the Future* (n.d.) advocate that leaders in higher education, and in particularly community colleges, must understand “individual faces and have strong ties to the human heart and spirit” (p.1). They argue that, “the art of leadership is all about vision, about painting a face on the future, and, by exciting others to positive action, ultimately bringing that face to life” (p. 1).

Shared Vision

Bennis and Nanus (1985) conducted a five-year study on 90 corporate and public sector leaders based on in depth interviews and observations. The main characteristic that the researchers found was that leaders had a vision for the future of their organizations. In not all instances was the vision clearly defined, but the consistent feature was that the “leaders demonstrated commitment to the vision by their decisions and behavior...[and] the leaders channeled the collective energies of organizational members in pursuit of the common vision” (Yukl, 2006, p. 268).

Nanus (1992) concludes that “developing and promulgating such a [shared] vision is the highest calling and truest purpose of leadership” (p. 19), and to this regard, he attempts to present a balanced view of what a vision can and cannot achieve. The most significant attributes of “powerful and transforming visions” (p. 28) include: an appropriateness in fit and timing, an adherence to standards of excellence and integrity, “creat[ing] focus and...[the] hope and promise of a better tomorrow” (p. 29), “inspir[ing] enthusiasm and encourag[ing] commitment” (p. 29), the ability to be easily

understood, and a reflection of organizational uniqueness. Additionally, the vision must be ambitious. Nanus cautions with six “things” that a vision is not: it is not a prophecy; it is not a mission or purpose; it is not factual – it “may never be realized as originally imagined” (p. 31); it “cannot be true or false” (p. 32) but rather evaluated as a direction; it should not be “static [or] enunciated once for all time” (p. 32); and it should not be a “constraint on actions, except for those inconsistent with the vision” (p. 32).

According to Senge (1994), the focus is not on creating a vision *statement* but rather on “unearthing shared ‘pictures of the future’ that foster genuine commitment and enrollment rather than compliance” (p. 9); something that could translate easily into meaningful action for all levels and classifications of employees within the organization. The vision must allow all employees within the organization to “see that their roles contribute to the overall success of our [organizational] efforts” (Roueche et al., 2008, p. 232). A well-defined and clearly communicated vision “help[s] the college constituents understand why their work matters...[and] is responsible for freeing the creative spirit” (Roueche et al., 2008, p. 248). But it is the leader of the institution that must drive this vision by creating conditions so that the direction is understood and by refocusing if employees lose sight of that direction and vision.

Values

While the vision is the “what we wish to create” and the mission is the “why do we exist,” the values are the “how we want to act” as we perform our mission and work towards achieving our vision; they are the foundation of all that we think and do as an

organization. They guide choices and have a role in driving how strategic priorities are developed, how annual objectives are established, and ultimately how fiscal and human resources are allocated (Senge, 1994).

Values are abstract ideas, but they “influence thinking and action in the organization and, ultimately, the choice of vision” (Nanus, 1992, p. 51). Furthermore, they influence “which issues are identified and [how] alternative goals are evaluated” (p. 51), and they “shape assumptions about the future and limit the range of choices considered for a new vision” (p. 51). Ultimately, the values and how they are rooted in the culture may limit new directions for the future.

Gardner (1990) emphasizes the need for regeneration and rebuilding of values – societal and organizational. A leader must adhere to this responsibility by spending a portion of “their time teaching the value framework” (p. 14). He concludes, “It is virtually impossible to exercise leadership if shared values have disintegrated.” (p. x).

Chapter Summary

In Plato’s allegory of the cave, the prisoners saw shadows that represented imitations of reality and misunderstandings of the nature of things they saw. The prisoner that was allowed to face the fire saw reality and faced the errors of his ways (Moor, 2007). The plight of education has similarities to this allegory. We have learned that the current system is not working. It is time to face those errors, address the critical issues facing education and the nation, and make changes.

Community colleges have a history of being the “people’s college” with access being at the core. The focus is now on access **and** success. The relationships between data, evidence, and accountability are the building blocks for institutions driven by a student success agenda. Three frameworks, the learning college concept, the Seven principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Education, and the Achieving the Dream: Community Colleges Count initiative, provide a context of redirecting an organization to learn from the past and to focus on new strategies, systems, and methodologies. The critical component in transforming an organization is the leader. He/She must be a transformational leader focused on a shared vision centered on a core value system.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Introduction

A qualitative research designed case study informed by quantitative data guided this study. The case study is considered the primary methodology, and the use of quantitative data is considered secondary. The purpose of this chapter is to focus on how the design and methodologies were employed to address the study's purpose and research questions. Toward this end, the chapter includes a descriptive overview and rationale for the chosen methodologies, and highlights the principle methods of data collection and analysis utilized in conducting the study. Additionally, this chapter provides the reader with an overview of how the study addressed validation and trustworthiness and methodology limitations.

Purpose Overview

The overarching goals of this study were twofold: first, to learn how community colleges are preparing students to flourish and contribute to a changing and global economy, and second, how they address those students that do not make it through the community college. Within this context, the researcher elected to perform a case study of the Tallahassee Community College (TCC), a college identified as focused on improving student success, empowering students to reach their goals, and committed to sharing data and information across and throughout the institution.

To achieve its ultimate goals, this study had four specific purposes. First, it provided an in-depth account of the development and implementation of the organizational vision and student success (learning and attainment) focus at Tallahassee Community College (TCC). Second, the study examined how the use of data provides transparency and redirected the focus of TCC. Third, it examined how the TCC's student learning portal is being used by students, faculty, staff, administrators, and the board of trustees. Finally, findings may inform policy makers, institutional leaders, and researchers about key factors impacting a student success. Taken in concert, the study was designed to provide a contextual framework for implementing an organizational vision focused on improving student success.

Research Questions

This study was guided by four primary research questions corresponding to the four-fold purpose of the study. The primary research questions and the issue-oriented supplementary questions or sub-questions are as follows:

Research Question 1: What institutional changes and efforts are taking place or have been implemented at TCC to improve student learning and attainment?

- a) What are the shared visions, values, beliefs, or assumptions characterizing the culture of TCC?
- b) How have these changed in the recent years?

Research Question 2: How is data used at TCC to focus on student learning and attainment?

- a) How is student success measured?
- b) How is teaching and learning measured?

- c) What data is collected?
- d) How is that data collected?
- e) What is done with the data that is collected?
- f) How does data impact the decision making process?
- g) How does the use of data make a difference?
- h) What impact has the data had in areas such as operations, budget development, and student outcomes?

Research Question 3: How is the TCC's student learning portal utilized by students, faculty, staff, administrators, and the board of trustees in analyzing and monitoring the progress on student learning and attainment?

Research Question 4: How can the work at TCC inform policy makers, institutional leaders, and researchers regarding key factors impacting a student success focus?

Qualitative Case Study Methodology

The primary methodology for this study was qualitative. Qualitative research is described as research that seeks to reveal “meaning that is socially constructed by individuals in interaction with their world” (Merriam, 2002b, p. 3). Willis (2007) identifies two characteristics that distinguish qualitative research: “the search for contextual understanding instead of universal law and a design-as-you-go or emergent approach” (p. 181). Further elaboration by Creswell (2007) offers that qualitative researchers study social or human problems in which they “collect data in natural settings with a sensitivity to the people under study, and they analyze their data inductively.... The final report provides for the voices of participants, a reflexivity of the

researchers, a complex description and interpretation of the problem, and a study that adds to the literature or provides a call for action” (p. 51).

Qualitative research is a broad term that “encompasses several philosophical or theoretical orientations” (Merriam, 2002b, p.15). Denzin and Lincoln (2000) write that qualitative research “does not belong to a single discipline. Nor does qualitative research have a distinct set of methods that are entirely its own” (p. 6). Additionally, there are several designs, methods, or genres of qualitative research. Merriam and Denzin and Lincoln, each focused on eight different methods and Creswell (2007) discussed five approaches. The four strategies that were consistent among the authors were: phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, and case study. The commonalities among these are “the search for meaning and understanding, the researcher as the primary instrument of data collection and analysis, an inductive analysis process, and a product that is a rich description of the phenomenon” (Merriam, 2002b, p. 15).

The researcher evaluated the various qualitative strategies presented in the literature and followed Patton’s (1990) primary criterion for judging methodological appropriateness: “whether one has made sensible methods decisions given the purpose of the inquiry, the questions being investigated, and the resources available” (p. 39). Taking into consideration these criteria, the case study approach was determined to be the most appropriate for examining Tallahassee Community College (TCC).

The starting point in conducting a case study begins with the purposeful selection, not a random selection, of the ‘case’ – it is “selected because it exhibits

characteristics of interest to the researcher” (Merriam & Associates, 2002, p. 179). As stated previously, the researcher’s interest was in how TCC is implementing an organizational vision focused on improving student success and preparing students to flourish and contribute to a changing and global economy; and how they address those students that do not make it through the community college. TCC has been identified as an institution that is focused on improving student success, empowering students to reach their goals, and sharing data and information across and throughout the institution. Prior to selecting TCC as the entity to be studied, the researcher read about TCC’s work in the *Lumina Foundation Lessons* (2008) and in Roueche, Richardson, Neal, and Roueche’s, *The Creative Community College: Leading Change Through Innovation* (2008). The researcher also had the opportunity to hear Dr. William D. Law, Jr., President of TCC, speak on two separate occasions, once on December 3, 2007, at the Community College Leadership Program at The University of Texas at Austin and the second on March 28, 2008, at the Achieving the Dream 2008 Board of Trustees Institute. Additionally, the researcher obtained counsel from John E. Roueche, Ph.D., Sid W. Richardson Regents Chair, Professor and Director, Community College Leadership Program (CCLP), The University of Texas at Austin (UT) (the researcher’s advisor and treatise supervisor) and Walter G. Bumphus, Ph.D., A. M. Aikin Chair, Professor and Chair, Department of Educational Administration, The University of Texas at Austin (UT) (a member of the researcher’s treatise committee).

Merriam (2002b) defines a case study as an “intensive description and analysis of a phenomenon or social unit such as an individual, group, institution, or community. The case is a bounded, integrated system” (p. 8). According to Creswell (2007), “case study research is a qualitative approach in which the investigator explores a bounded system (a *case*) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving *multiple sources of information* (e.g., observations, interviews, audiovisual material, and documents and reports), and reports a case *description* and case-based themes” (p. 73). Yin (2003) describes the case study research strategy as “an all-encompassing method – covering the logic of design, data collection techniques, and specific approaches to data analysis...[it] is a comprehensive research strategy” (p. 14).

A case study is characterized by the unit of analysis (Merriam, 2002b) which can be a fundamental problem in defining the specific case (Yin, 2003). The unit of analysis for this study encompassed both a “holistic analysis of the entire case...[and] an embedded analysis of a specific aspect of the case” (Creswell, 2007, p. 75). Tallahassee Community College (TCC) served as the unit of analysis for the entire case. This enabled the researcher to examine “the global nature” (Yin, 2003, p. 43) of the organization including how “leaders are fostering collective institutional vision, values, and learning; examin[ing] the intervention strategies being implemented; and learn[ing] about other factors at the college contributing to institutional transformation to improve

student success” (Mathis, 2006, pp. 76-77) including the collection and use of data in decision making:

Within the single case may still be incorporated subunits of analysis, so that a more complex – or embedded – design is developed. The subunits can often add significant opportunities for extensive analysis, enhancing the insights into the single case....Thus, an embedded design can serve as an important device for focusing a case study inquiry. (Yin, 2003, pp. 45-46)

The embedded unit of analysis in this study was TCC’s student learning portal; a tool that TCC believes is instrumental for student success. It is claimed that this tool provides TCC with a “much greater ability to learn about out students’ actual behaviors...[and] affords an opportunity to do some valuable data analysis on the manner in which students move through the institution on a success path or a path that confounds their success” (Law, 2008, p. 236).

As a final component of defining the unit of analysis, Yin (2003) suggests that, “specific time boundaries are needed to define the beginning and end of the case” (p. 26). For this study the beginning time boundary begins with Dr. Law’s arrival to TCC in 2002 and continued through March 2009. This study provides a brief historical (prior to 2002) overview of TCC and its accomplishments, but limited data was collected.

Secondary Quantitative Data Methodology

Valsiner (2000) concludes that quantitative data is actually a derivative of qualitative data. While many on either side of the research paradigms will argue with this conclusion, this researcher elected to gather secondary quantitative data to inform the study about academic and student interventions implemented at TCC and to

determine their effectiveness. Archival documents, the website, and internal staff and Board reports along with progress and information reports on Achieving the Dream, the federal Title III grant, and the Quality Enhancement Plan were examined to determine progress made on improving student outcomes.

As a Round One Achieving the Dream institution, TCC began tracking the prescribed cohort data by categories including retention, persistence, developmental and gateway course completion, graduation rates, and achievement gaps. President Law (2008) expressed concern that “as we [TCC] developed the conceptual framework for engagement and support of ATD [Achieving the Dream] students, we realized that the effort should include all students” (p. 235). Accordingly, secondary data for not only the Achieving the Dream cohorts but also comparable data for the entire enrollment was reviewed. Dr. Law also noted the institution’s dropout pattern, which he referred to as “an undiagnosed cancer” (2008, p. 233) warranted monitoring and action in order to prepare students for not only their college life but also their life in the workplace. Consequently, trend dropout data was reviewed also.

The researcher, as a pragmatist, does “not see the world as an absolute unity...[but] look[s] to many approaches to collecting and analyzing data rather than subscribing to only one way (e.g., quantitative or qualitative)” (Creswell, 2007, p. 23). The mix of quantitative and qualitative evidence is espoused by Yin (2003) as long as it fits within the research design. To this regard, the researcher believes that without examining quantitative data to document student outcome progress; some readers would

question the completeness, rigor, and legitimacy of this qualitative research study. Such data including clear measures of progress is considered significant for policy makers, institutional leaders, and other researchers who may utilize this study as a framework for promoting a student success agenda based on a culture of evidence.

Initial Contact with Tallahassee Community College

The researcher contacted Dr. William D. Law, Jr., President in August 2008 to obtain permission to conduct a case study on Tallahassee Community College (TCC). Dr. Law responded positively with the comment, “I’ll be interested to see how the story unfolds from a third party perspective.” Dr. Law also appointed Scott Balog, Director of Institutional Research and Planning as the researcher’s point of contact. It was agreed that interviews, observations, and other fieldwork would be performed with the researcher visiting TCC over several days in order “to collect data in the field at the site where participants’ experience the issue...under study” (Creswell, 2007, p. 37).

Qualitative Data Collection

Data collection requires good preparation as well as an inquiry mind (Yin, 2003). While the data collection strategies may be altered during a study, “researchers need to be flexible... [and] plan ahead as much as possible for their sampling strategy” (Creswell, 2007, p. 126). Two additional aspects of qualitative data collection should be considered during the study: purposeful sampling and multiple perspectives (Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 2002a; Yin, 2003). The use of purposeful sampling allows for data or individuals to be “selected on purpose to yield the most information about the

phenomenon of interest” (Merriam, 2002a, p. 20), or they “can purposefully inform an understanding of the research problems and central phenomenon in the study” (Creswell, 2007, p. 125). Along this same line, information and interviews should represent “multiple perspectives that range over the entire spectrum of perspectives” (Creswell, p. 123). The goal is to have “different perspectives on the problem, process, or event” that is being portrayed in the study (Creswell, p. 74).

Yin (2003) recommends that six types of qualitative information be collected: “documentation, archival records, interviews, direct observation, participant-observation, and physical artifacts” (p. 83). The researcher used four of the forms prescribed; the exceptions are participant-observation and physical artifacts. Additionally, the researcher added one focus group to the interview category. The following highlights the researcher’s data collection approach including an overview of Yin’s (2003) definition and words of caution:

Documentation. There are multiple forms of documents including letters, memorandums, agendas, minutes of meetings, newspaper clippings, administrative documents, and staff reports. The researcher began with minutes, agendas, and other supporting documents from Board of Trustees and leadership team meetings and workshops, documents related to Achieving the Dream, Title III, Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE), the Quality Enhancement Plan, and other documents available on TCC’s website and portal. The researcher asked her assigned contact to assist with other documents that he deemed pertinent at the time. Additionally, based on comments from interviewees, additional documents such as internal reports and consultant reports were obtained. Another source of documentation reviewed were the notes

from Dr. Christine McPhail, TCC's Achieving the Dream coach. Yin (2003) cautions that while documents can take many forms and are useful, "they are not always accurate and may not be lacking in bias...every document was written for some specific purpose and some specific audience *other than* those of the case study being done" (p. 87).

Archival Records. This category includes numerous types such as organizational charts, budgets, survey data, vision, mission, and value statements. The researcher reviewed the documents listed above along with TCC's strategic plan and community reports and Dr. Law's presentations to the faculty convocation. The researcher requested her assigned contact to assist with other documents that he deemed pertinent to the study. Again, Yin (2003) encourages the researcher to "be certain to ascertain the conditions under which it was produced as well as its accuracy" (p. 89).

Interviews. Interviews are considered one of the most important sources of case study information (Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 2002; Yin, 2003). They should be "guided conversations rather than structured queries" (Yin, 2003, p. 89) with the questions fluid and not rigid and having an open-ended nature for responses of fact as well as opinion (Rubin & Rubin, 2005; Yin, 2003). The researcher did not have a predetermined number for the interviews to be conducted. But rather the researcher employed purposeful sampling and "corroborate[d] interview data with other sources" (Yin, 2003, p. 92). In actuality, the researcher conducted 27 individual interviews and one focus group with four participants resulting in a total of 31 participants. The interviewees consisted of the president, board of trustees, senior leaders (leadership team), mid-level managers (registrar, directors, and deans), faculty, students, and the Achieving the Dream coach. The interviews were tape recorded and transcribed verbatim. Two interview protocols were developed, one for student participants and one for all other participants. These interview protocols were developed based on the work of Dr. Margaretta

Mathis in conducting a case study of The Community College in Baltimore County. Permission was obtained from Dr. Mathis to use and modify her original protocol. The modified protocols were used to direct the interviews and focus group conducted at Tallahassee Community College. They are attached as Appendices A and B (Mathis, 2006). Additionally, all participants were asked to sign a consent form, which is attached as Appendix C.

Direct Observation. In conjunction with a field visit, observations may provide an insight into relevant behaviors or environmental conditions related to the case study (Yin, 2003). The researcher observed a variety of meetings including the walk through session for the Board of Trustees' Workshop and Board Meeting; Board of Trustees' workshop; Board of Trustees' board meeting; Strategic Forum meeting; Budget Development meeting; Achieving the Dream Team meeting; and two Student Recruitment and Enrollment Strategies meetings. Additionally, the researcher walked the campus between interviews and on the way to interviews in order to observe interactions among staff, faculty, and students. The researcher maintained an observational stance as an outsider rather than a participant. However, if opportunities to participate in casual conversation with personnel, Board members or students of TCC arose, the researcher interacted and conversed freely, and she took field notes based on conversations and observations as deemed necessary.

“The best rule of thumb is that the data and emerging findings must feel saturated; that is, you begin to see or hear the same things over and over again, and no new information surfaces as you collect more data” (Merriam, 2002a, p. 26).

Qualitative Data Analysis

Data analysis in qualitative research has “an interpretation element that flows throughout the process of research” (Creswell, 2007, p. 231), and in a case study “as data are being collected, data analysis is ongoing and simultaneous” (Merriam, 2002b, p. 15). The interpretive role of the researcher requires “quickly review[ing] the evidence and continually ask[ing] yourself why events or facts appear as they do. Your [the researcher’s] judgments may lead to the immediate need to search for additional evidence” (Yin, 2003, p. 59).

Four forms of data analysis and interpretation for case study research are advocated by Stake (1995) of which three apply to the single case study. Categorical interpretation, direct interpretation, and naturalistic generalizations, were used by the researcher in analyzing the data with the least emphasis being placed on direct interpretation.

In categorical aggregation, the researcher seeks a collection of instances from the data, hoping that issue-relevant meanings will emerge. In direct interpretation, on the other hand, the case study researcher looks at a single instance and draws meaning from it without looking for multiple instances....Finally, the researcher develops naturalistic generalizations from analyzing data, generalizations that people can learn from the case either for themselves or to apply to a population of cases. (Creswell, 2007, p. 163)

While Yin (2003) advocates having a strategy for analyzing the data, he acknowledges that in some situations, the researcher may have to “play with the data” (p. 138) in order to determine what should be analyzed, how to analyze it, and at what

level. The key to analysis is developing the approach that provides a thorough and detailed description of the case and its setting.

Validation and Trustworthiness

Many terms are used to describe the perception of validation or trustworthiness of a qualitative study. Some of these terms have been criticized for their tie to other paradigms rather than to the naturalistic paradigm. To this regard, Lincoln and Guba (1985) propose that a qualitative study should reflect credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

The concept of credibility, or “activities that make it more likely that credible findings and interpretations will be produced” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 301), is paramount in the qualitative research process. The researcher utilized the following techniques, as recommended by Lincoln and Guba (1985), to establish credibility:

Prolonged engagement -- exposes the researcher to multiple influences and provides for the investment of sufficient time to build trust, learn the culture, and review for misinformation or distortions whether attributable to the researcher personally or to respondents;

Persistent observation -- allows the researcher to provide depth by “identify[ing] those characteristics and elements in the situation that are most relevant to the problem or issue being pursued and focusing on them in detail” (p. 304);

Triangulation -- makes use of “different data collection modes (interview, questionnaire, observation, testing) or different designs” (p. 306) to corroborate evidence; and

Member checks -- considered “the most crucial technique for establishing credibility” (p. 314), takes tentative findings back to the participants to ensure that interpretations and conclusions are correct.

The concept of transferability requires “rich, thick description” (Creswell, 2007, p. 209) of the situation being studied. “With such detailed description, the researcher enables readers to transfer information to other settings and to determine whether the findings can be transferred ‘because of shared characteristics’” (p. 209). While Lincoln & Guba (1985) refer to this concept as transferability and Merriam (2002a) refers to it as user generalizability, both agree that the researcher must provide the appropriate level of description and detail, but the reader must determine the applicability. It has been the intention of the researcher to provide the appropriate level of detail and description for the study or parts of it to be transferable to other educational settings.

Lincoln and Guba’s (1985) third criteria for trustworthiness is dependability or “the extent to which research findings can be replicated...yield the same results” (Merriam, 2002a, p. 27). While this criterion is considered problematic since the study is based on human responses and behaviors which are never static (Merriam, 2002a), the researcher enhanced the reliability by taking detailed field notes, using a tape recorder for all interviews and focus groups, and transcribing tapes and handwritten notes verbatim and in a timely manner.

The fourth criterion is confirmability or establishing objectivity in the data (Creswell, 2007; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The audit trail is the major technique in

establishing confirmability and it also supports dependability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 2002a).

An audit trail in a qualitative study describes in detail how data were collected, how categories were derived, and how decisions were made throughout the inquiry. The audit trail is dependent upon the researcher keeping a research journal or recording memos throughout the conduct of the study. (Creswell, 2007, p. 27)

Another step to the journaling process is to expand it, to not only capture a running record of interactions, but to use it as a reflexive tool also. Through 'reflexivity' - "the process of reflecting critically on the self as researcher, the 'human as instrument'" (Lincoln & Guba, 2000, p. 183), the researcher can clarify his assumptions, paradigms, and interpretations of data (Merriam, 2002a). The researcher employed an audit trail along with the reflexive journal for this study. Additionally, the researcher discussed findings and perspectives with Dr. John E. Roueche, treatise supervisor, and other members of the treatise committee as deemed necessary.

Limitations of Methodology

The research for this study was primarily based on an analysis of literature and an analysis of information drawn from Tallahassee Community College (TCC) including documentation, archival records, interviews, focus groups, and direct observations. It was the intent of the researcher to ground the data collection, analysis, and report writing in sound practices, but some limitations remain. The study is based on a single entity with an embedded unit of analysis, and the goal was to provide an intensive description and analysis. But a case study on a single entity leads one to question the transferability

or the generalization of the study. The researcher makes no claim that transferability will be made, but rather the reader will need to make such a determination.

Chapter Summary

Merriam (2002c) expounds, “the nature of qualitative research is as much a social and psychological process as it is systematic inquiry. Because the process is a journey, if not a struggle, it is crucial to study a phenomenon that you are *really* curious about, that you care about, [and] that you are passionate about” (p. 423). These criteria apply to the researcher and the phenomenon selected for this case study, Tallahassee Community College. The researcher believed and continues to believe that the unique story should be documented and shared with others.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

Introduction

The first three chapters of this treatise laid the groundwork for understanding the research problem and the purpose and significance of the study, a review of the related literature, and the methodology that guided the research. This chapter is dedicated to presenting the research findings and is organized into six sections with a chapter summary.

The findings of this case study are presented to tell a story about the unit of analysis (Tallahassee Community College) and the embedded unit of analysis (the student learning portal). To accomplish this, the researcher employed multiple approaches. First, imparting a portion of the case study chronologically based on key historical events; and second, presenting the findings in a categorical or topical format based on an inductive analysis of data (Patton, 2002). Finally, the researcher highlights qualitative data being used at TCC to measure progress on the student success agenda.

In the first section of this chapter, the researcher reviews the research questions that formed the basis of this study. In addition, she provides a brief overview of the data collected and how that data was analyzed and organized in response to addressing the research questions.

The second section provides a chronological presentation with an overview of institutional context. Included in this overview are a brief discussion on the institutional history, demographic highlight, budget, and the college's vision, mission statements,

organizational values, and practices. This section also includes a summary of the college's strategic plan and organizational framework that provides the general direction and focus of the institution's initiatives and activities.

Section 3 highlights the institution's last accreditation and specifically the goals and objectives of its quality enhancement plan (QEP). Additionally, the goals and objectives of two grant programs, Achieving the Dream and Title III, are reviewed in detail. The initiatives and projects of the QEP and the two grant programs are highlighted to illustrate the alignment and integration of the student success agenda across the institution using multiple funding sources.

Section 4 continues to present qualitative data based largely on site visits to TCC to conduct interviews and make observations. This section provides an overview of the data collection processes utilized including a summary of the 31 constituents interviewed, the interviewee selection process, and the interview protocols. The majority of this chapter elucidates on the eight themes that were identified through the interviews.

In the fifth section, qualitative data related to the student portal and the individual learning plans are presented. This information was collected through the interviews but largely with student and faculty participants.

Section 6 provides a review of quantitative data being used by TCC in measuring the success of their work. The researcher was provided with a multitude of quantitative data. The information presented in this section reflects information reported to the Board

of Trustees at board workshops. The chapter concludes with a brief summary of the study and its findings.

Section 1 - Organization of Data Analysis

This study is guided by the following four primary research questions and the issue-oriented supplementary questions or sub-questions:

Research Question 1: What institutional changes and efforts are taking place or have been implemented at Tallahassee Community College (TCC) to improve student learning and attainment?

- a) What are the shared visions, values, beliefs, or assumptions characterizing the culture of TCC?
- b) How have these changed in the recent years?

Research Question 2: How is data used at TCC to focus on student learning and attainment?

- a) How is student success measured?
- b) How is teaching and learning measured?
- c) What data is collected?
- d) How is that data collected?
- e) What is done with the data that is collected?
- f) How does data impact the decision making process?
- g) How does the use of data make a difference?
- h) What impact has the data had in areas such as operations, budget development, and student outcomes?

Research Question 3: How is the TCC's student learning portal utilized by students, faculty, staff, administrators, and the board of trustees in analyzing and monitoring the progress on student learning and attainment?

Research Question 4: How can the work at TCC inform policy makers, institutional leaders, and researchers regarding key factors impacting a student success focus?

The data analysis in this chapter of the study documents the pertinent attributes of the data collected and assembled. The qualitative data presented in Sections 2 and 3 are based on reviews of archival records and documentation. In some cases, comments from interviewees were used to supplement the archival records and documentation.

Section 4 continues to assimilate qualitative data gathered through interviews and observations on site at TCC. It is focused on the eight themes that emerged from the interviews. Section 5 is focused on qualitative data related to the student portal and the individual learning plans. The majority of the data collected for this section is based on interviews with student and faculty participants. Section 6 incorporates selective quantitative data as a secondary methodology to analyze the impact of the focus on student success at TCC.

No one method of analysis is attributable to addressing any specific research question. Rather each of the methods contributed to the overall support and examination of each. The reader will find that concepts and programs identified in Sections 2 and 3 will be discussed in Sections 4 through 6. Every attempt was made to explain the concepts and programs when first referenced, but in some cases the researcher determined it more effective to explain at a later point. For example, data and information technology are referenced in Section 3, but a historical perspective of this

area is not provided until Section 4. In making such decisions, the researcher considered the context and nature of the data presented in each section.

Section 2 - The Institutional Context of Tallahassee Community College

Historical, Structure, and Service

As discussed in Chapter 1, Tallahassee Community College (TCC) was founded in 1966 and is located in the Florida Big Bend Region. It is a single-campus, comprehensive community college with four off-campus centers. The service area includes three counties – Leon, Gadsden, and Wakulla. These counties are a unique blend of populations including those from “poor, isolated rural communities, Florida’s historically wealthy agricultural communities, and the Florida State government” (Law, 2008, p. 230). Such diversified needs and populations along with the changes and challenges of a global economy have been instrumental drivers in the institutional transformation that has occurred at TCC. In this section, several depictions are provided to illustrate the institution’s current reputation for educational leadership, innovation, student success focus, and continuous improvement.

The institution is governed by a seven member Board of Trustees, all of whom are appointed by the Governor of the State of Florida and confirmed by the Florida Senate. The current slate includes four females and three males. The group is ethnically and professionally diversified. Their seniority varies with the two most senior members appointed in 1999, and the two most junior were first appointed in 2007. Four of these members were appointed to the Board of Trustees prior to the selection of the current

president. Dr. William (Bill) Law began his tenure in 2002 as the college's fifth president.

The college's operating budget began the 2009 fiscal year at \$56.7 million of which State appropriations accounted for 54.8%, tuition and fees represented 38.6%, and other revenues accounted for the remainder of 6.6%. While built on a five percent enrollment growth, the total operating budget for 2009 was significantly less than the budgets for 2008 and 2007, totaling \$59.4 million and \$56.6 million, respectively. During the 2009 fiscal year, the State of Florida announced a shortfall, and TCC prepared for an appropriations reduction. In anticipation of the final cut, TCC reduced its budget by 7.5% of the State appropriation or \$2,325,000 (TCC, 2007a, 2008d, 2009b).

TCC is an open admission college. For 2007-2008, the College served an annual unduplicated headcount of 33,614 of which 19,316 represented credit student (TCC, 2007b). For Fall 2008, the demographic composite of the 14,163 credit students enrolled is:

- 55% female and 45% male;
- 56% White, 32% Black, and 7% Hispanic;
- 61% are 21 and younger;
- 26% were first time in college (FTIC) students; and
- 50% were full-time and 50% were part-time. (TCC, 2009d)

TCC awarded a total of 2,528 degrees and certificates for the 2007-2008 academic year. For several years, TCC has been recognized annually, in Community College Week's Top 100 colleges for the number of associate degrees awarded. The

most recent recognition occurred in June 2008 when TCC ranked 14th among two-year institutions in the total number of associate degrees awarded. At this same time, TCC ranked eighth nationally in the number of degrees awarded to African Americans (Community College Week, 2008). TCC also boasts on its website of the highest transfer percentage of any Florida community college with nearly 75% of its graduates with associate of arts degrees transferring to the State University System within a year (TCC, 2009a).

Mission, Vision, and Values

Tallahassee Community College's mission statement was approved by the Board in 2003 and reads as follows:

Tallahassee Community College is an open admission, comprehensive community college. Its mission is to provide excellence in teaching and learning through educational programs that promote intellectual, social, and personal development of students; to assist them in developing the ability to think critically, creatively, and reflectively; and to prepare them for productive and satisfying lives. (TCC, n.d.f)

At first blush, this mission statement is very similar to those used by many other community colleges in the United States. But the power of Tallahassee Community College's (TCC) work is really defined in the following three statements:

- 1) The definition of student success is that students finish what they start.
- 2) Those of us who do not teach share a common responsibility to help students get to class in the best condition for learning.
- 3) We must act on the realization that access to college changes students' self perception, but degrees and certificates change students' lives. (Law, 2008, p. 232)

These three statements are referred to by President Law as “visions” and by other as “principles of student success.” No matter what they are called, the important component is that they were repeated and referenced several times throughout the researcher’s interviews.

In addition, various documents referenced five concepts: **innovation, diversity, excellence, access, and success**. While the usages of these concepts were very similar, unique features were added to each. For example, in reference to TCC’s role in the community, the college’s website (TCC, n.d.f.) identifies the concepts as five critical areas:

- **Innovation:** TCC will respond quickly and purposefully to community need for education and workforce programs and services.
- **Diversity:** Improve opportunities, programs, and facilities to meet the diverse needs of the community.
- **Community Excellence:** Contribute to the social, economic and cultural well-being of the community, the district, and the state.
- **Community Access:** Make educational opportunities and programs easily accessible to the community.
- **Community Success:** Facilitate student’s successful transition to the workforce or additional education.

In contrast, in the strategic plan for 2007-2010, these concepts are referred to as guiding principles “centered in governing the institution with integrity and in an ongoing commitment to enhance the quality of the institution’s programs and services” (TCC, n.d.f). These five guiding principles are defined in the strategic plan:

- 1) **Innovation:** The College fosters innovation and creativity in educational programs, instructional methods, and services.
- 2) **Diversity:** The College promotes a climate that values and celebrates diversity and an academic culture that recognizes the strengths and talents of all members of the community.
- 3) **Excellence:** The College strives to develop and maintain high academic and professional standards with an emphasis on excellence in all areas of the College.
- 4) **Access:** The College serves students with diverse backgrounds and provides equal access to educational and professional programs that further the students' varied interests and goals.
- 5) **Success:** The College promotes student success by enabling students to develop the skills and knowledge needed to achieve their individual goals. (TCC, n.d.f)

The researcher considers these concepts to be the core values of TCC. As previously explained in Chapter 2 of this treatise, the values of an organization are the “how we want to act” as we perform our mission. These values guide choices, drive how strategic priorities are developed, how annual objectives are established, and ultimately how resources are allocated (Senge, 1994).

Strategic Plan

Building on the guiding principles or values, the strategic plan covers a three-year period from 2007 through 2010. The plan is based on four assumptions and identifies eight strategic priorities. The four underlying assumptions are the infrastructure required for the strategic plan to be implemented, supported, and assessed:

- 1) **Resources:** The Strategic Plan assumes that the College will explore and actively seek additional funding sources to adequately support the initiatives of the Plan.

- 2) **Institutional Research:** The Strategic Plan assumes that the College will support the institutional research functions necessary to develop and assess the initiatives in the Plan.
- 3) **Technology:** The Strategic Plan assumes that the College will acquire and utilize appropriate technologies to support and advance the initiatives in the Plan.
- 4) **Communication:** The Strategic Plan assumes that the College will develop and disseminate information necessary to implement, support, and advance the initiatives in the Plan. (TCC, n.d.f)

The eight strategic priorities defined by for Tallahassee Community College's Strategic Plan are goal and operational extensions of the four underlying assumptions:

- **Priority 1: Student Success**

Provide programs and services to students that increase the opportunity for students to define and reach their educational and career goals by connecting them to the appropriate college resources and empowering them to take responsibility for their education.

- **Priority 2: Enhanced Learning**

Deliver academic programs and learning support services that provide students with the appropriate resources for learning the knowledge and skills needed for the workplace or for transfer to baccalaureate programs in state universities. This priority requires exceptional levels of performance and achievement by all faculty and staff and therefore includes campus support and resources to meet professional growth expectations for all employees.

- **Priority 3: Community**

Provide innovative solutions that strengthen our region's economy and workforce competitiveness.

- **Priority 4: Alternative Delivery Systems**

Deliver curriculum and learning support resources at appropriate times and in appropriate formats to meet student needs.

- **Priority 5: Technology and Out of Class Support**

Implement the appropriate technology and services to facilitate the learning environment for every Tallahassee Community College student.

- **Priority 6: Finance**

Provide effective stewardship to enhance new and existing revenues and resources to promote growth and increase cost effectiveness.

- **Priority 7: Facilities**

Develop and construct capital projects that enhance the learning centered environment, improve physical facilities, and ensure physical safety.

- **Priority 8: Foundation**

Develop and implement systems for attracting financial resources to enhance student access and promote excellence in teaching and learning. (TCC, n.d.f)

Under each strategic priority are two to ten annual goals, and each goal is supported with executable strategies (TCC, n.d.). The development, purpose, and impact of the strategic plan are discussed in greater detail in Section 4 of this chapter.

Section 3 – Integrated Initiatives, Programs, and Funding

Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS)

SACS is coming over the horizon. I got here in May and SACS is about one and a half years away... We had no game plan... Fortunately, they had just changed the SACS requirements to the quality plan approach. I said we are going to do one. You could have put it off, but I would rather be the first one in and have them say, 'I don't know if the school is weak or whether the system is weak.' We dressed that up and part of that became an analytical part...we did a great job...the point is that we had to have some data so the faculty would know they had to make changes in what they do.

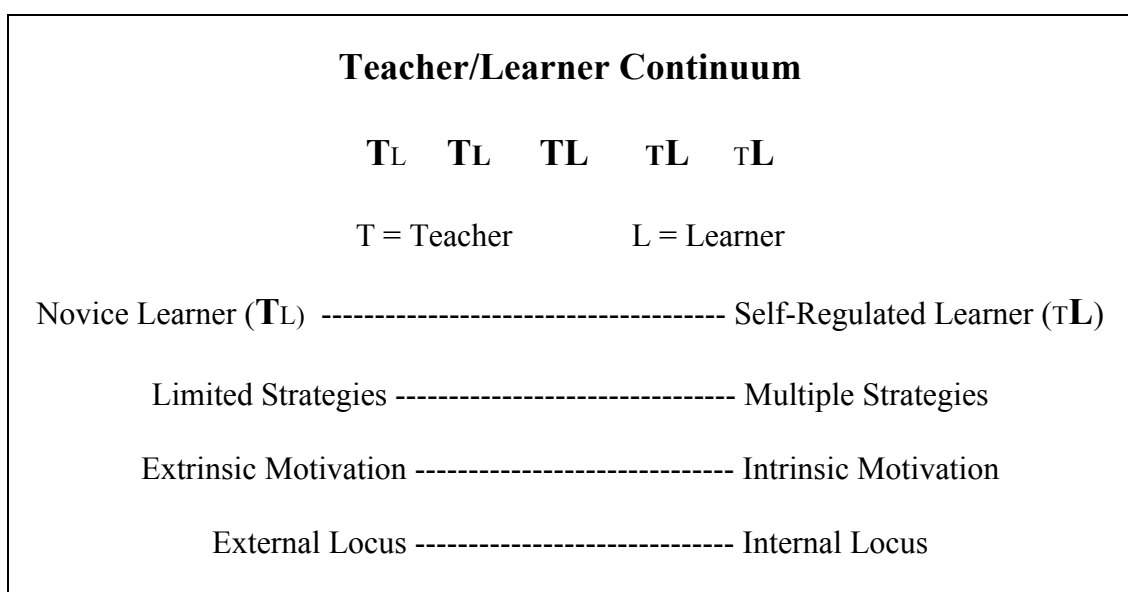
(President Law, personal communication)

Tallahassee Community College (TCC) is accredited through the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) with the last reaffirmation in June 2005 (SACS, 2005). The institution completed a compliance report and an on-site visit in 2004 and complied with newly revised principles that became effective on January 1, 2004. As part of the process, the college also developed a comprehensive five-year quality enhancement plan (QEP) based on the premise that if the college was to “make substantive progress in improving the quality of student learning, the issues of student engagement must be addressed but strategically and holistically” (as cited by SACS, 2004, p. 22). The QEP is an important step in TCC’s focus on, and commitment, to student success.

The underlying frameworks of the QEP are based on O’Banion’s Learning College Principles, Chickering and Gamson’s “Seven Principles for Good Practice in

Undergraduate Education” (both frameworks are addressed in Chapter 2), and the assumptions of an internally developed model, the Teacher/Learner Continuum. This model, as illustrated in Table 1, depicts the growth stages of a learner and the changing roles, responsibility, and partnership of teacher and learner in the learning process. It also depicts the incorporation of academic and social integration.

Table 1
Teacher/Learner Continuum



Note: Tallahassee Community College (n.d.). *TCC Quality Enhancement Plan Highlights*.

One interviewee described philosophies supporting the Teacher/Learner Continuum:

Wherever a student comes into the institution, we help them get from a novice learner to a self-directed [self-regulated] learner. A novice learner might need more support, and we are moving them towards self-direction. Whenever they come into the institution, we have to serve them. If we have self-directed students at the beginning, we put them in honors [and] leadership stuff... We have behaviors that go with it. It's not necessarily someone who starts in prep. We have people who come in with academic deficiency, [and] they might not be

the same people with strategy deficiencies. That might just be a person who comes back to college that just needs academics. There might be some people who come in at higher level course but never disciplined to control their own lives, they have a lot of work to do there. We try to discern those things. When we did the quality enhancement plan...[it] was to improve student success. (Interviewee #12)

The QEP is in its fifth and final year; and more than \$1.1 million has been invested in its five initiatives targeted at teaching and learning, early intervention, and communication and collaboration. A condensed version of the QEP lists 37 action plans required to implement these initiatives; and within the plans are multiple outcomes, outputs, and measures. TCC represents that significant milestones for the five initiatives have been achieved:

- 1) **Critical Thinking Initiative.** “Faculty across campus have defined critical thinking learning outcomes, revised master and individual syllabi, and designed teaching experiences to help students develop their ability to think critically and creatively” (TCC, n.d.g).
- 2) **Learning Communities Initiative.** “Faculty members are collaborating on a wide range of innovative and exciting interdisciplinary integrative assignments that help bring students and faculty together and promote deep learning” (TCC, n.d.g). Learning communities involving linked classes and integrative assignments were developed in several areas including history and theater, film and Spanish, history and sociology, English and physical science, and business and recreation (TCC, 2007c).
- 3) **College Success Initiative.** “Overall, new students who successfully complete the College Success course have higher success rates, higher GPAs, and lower withdrawal rates than those who don't enroll in the course” (TCC, n.d.g). “Enhancements to the course include a customized textbook developed by TCC faculty focused on content, assessment of core learning outcomes, self-

assessment tools and student behavior awareness; faculty training materials; and expanded resources” (TCC, 2007c).

- 4) **Early Alert and Peer Support Initiative.** “In 2005-06, an early alert system was put in place for all new students. The system has since been expanded to include early alerts for all college prep and college success students. Students having difficulty in classes are contacted by the Student Success Center, encouraged to contact their professors, and connected to the appropriate resources” (TCC, n.d.g).
- 5) **Campus Culture Initiative.** “In 2005-06, nearly 800 students were surveyed on issues relating to diversity and culturally responsive teaching. Faculty responded to similar questions in August 2006 at the close of three diversity workshops” (TCC, n.d.g). Six areas of concern with regard to classroom climate at TCC were noted from the student surveys:
 - 56% of students overall perceived that they were not *treated as an individual*,
 - 41% of students overall perceived a cultural divide between the instructor and students in their class as it related to *gender*,
 - 39% of students overall perceived a cultural divide between the instructor and students in their classes as it related to *age*,
 - 40% of students overall perceived that the *course curriculum design* in their classes is not sensitive to the differences that exist among the student population at TCC,
 - 50% of students overall perceived that the *expression of different perspectives and worldviews* was not encouraged in their classes, and
 - 45 % of overall students perceived that the *teaching methods* utilized in their classes did not meet their learning needs. (TCC, n.d.e)

In 2006-2007, divisional meetings were held whereby faculty worked together to address the outcomes of the diversity and culturally responsive survey. In 2007-2008,

the faculty continued to “develop strategies to address cultural differences and celebrate diversity” (TCC, 2007c).

The scope of the QEP has been described as “ambitious and multifaceted” (SACS, 2004, p. 30), and several references were made about the QEP and its scope during the interviews conducted as part of the researcher’s qualitative procedures. Clearly, the QEP is an integral component of the student success focus for the organization. McPhail (2005) reported, “The college’s recent accreditation efforts set the stage for the AtD [Achieving the Dream] initiatives and helped to facilitate the data collection and analyses processes” (McPhail, n.d.).

Achieving the Dream

The College is progressively advancing to become a more data-driven, learning-centered institution. Participation in Achieving the Dream would enhance our efforts to promote student learning outcomes and develop a ‘culture of evidence’ on our campus.

(President Law, TCC, 2004)

An overview of the Achieving the Dream: Community Colleges Count initiative (Achieving the Dream) was provided in Chapter 2 of this study. In 2004, Tallahassee Community College [TCC] was selected to participate in the first round of Achieving the Dream colleges. Following a year of analyzing quantitative and qualitative data, TCC submitted a four year implementation grant “based on the same philosophy of student success and institutional improvement” (TCC, 2004, p. 11) as the quality enhancement plan (QEP). TCC’s participation in the Achieving the Dream initiative was considered the beginning of a continuous improvement plan:

This mechanism for continuous improvement is missing from the College's current [prior to 2005] strategic plan...the proposed system of continuous improvement will ensure that the College's strategic planning will be based on evidence of barriers to student success and of the effectiveness of practices and policies intended to overcome those barriers. (TCC, 2004, pp. 11-12)

The strategies of the Achieving the Dream grant were considered part of the infrastructure and capacity building required for not only the QEP but also other student success initiatives. The overall goal of the five strategies was to “promote higher rates of student retention and success” (TCC, 2004, p. 7). Significant progress has been made on the Achieving the Dream strategies:

Strategy 1: Professional Development – Diversity

This strategy was to “provide resources and information to assist faculty, staff, and administrators to teach under-prepared and culturally diverse students” (TCC, n.d.a). Not only has this strategy built on and supported the QEP's Campus Culture Initiative and the master syllabus under the QEP's Critical Thinking Initiative, it has also opened the dialogue between faculty and Student Affairs staff and provided training to both on advising. Additionally, Student Affairs staff received training on diversity, customer service, and the role of assessment.

Strategy 2: Academic and Student Support/Progressive Advising Model

The second strategy was to “equip under-prepared and culturally diverse students to be successful” (TCC, 2008g, p. 21). The overarching intervention strategy was for the implementation of Individual Learning Plans (ILP) for first-time-in-college (FTIC) students. “FTIC entrants will participate in diagnostic assessments in academic readiness, personal development, social integration, and life challenges. The results will be used to develop ILPs...[with] the student's advisor or a counselor in the student portal (TCC Passport). The ILPs will help students chart, monitor, and evaluate their progress” (TCC, 2008g, pp. 21-22).

As part of this strategy new student orientation was redesigned with the addition of a parent and family session, and an advising syllabus was created and implemented. Finally, under this strategy TCC created a progressive advising model based on the philosophy:

Tallahassee Community College believes in the progressive advising model which is a system of shared responsibility between students and the College. The College community works with students to develop educational and career plans and provides opportunities for refining academic and life skills. Many students enter the institution with questions related to course selection and immediate needs, but adviser/student interactions can evolve into life and career planning and eventually lead students toward managing the advising process in a more self-directed approach. (TCC, 2008a)

The model prescribes that each step of the advising process be defined with specific activities linked to performance indicators and learning outcomes from zero credit hours (FTIC) through 60 credit hours. Table 2 provides a sample of the progressive advising model:

Table 2
Sample of activities prescribed by the progressive advising model

| Number of Credit Hours | TCC Performance Indicator The student will . . . | Learning Outcomes | Advising Activities |
|-------------------------------|---|--|---|
| 0 | Acquire information that will help you be successful at TCC. | <p>After completing New Student Orientation, students will be able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify the appropriate degree program (AA, AS, AAS or certificate programs) that matches the educational and/or career goal(s). • Identify where to find help in making a program choice. • Explain the importance of attending all classes. • Identify components of an academic plan. • Classify a set of potential challenges (in areas related to school, work and family responsibilities) as controllable by students, moderately controllable, or out of a student's control. • Identify campus and college-wide events and activities. • Identify the services provided by academic and non-academic resources. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New Student Orientation |
| 0-15 | Make academic and social connections and successfully complete the first 15 hours of college credit at TCC. | <p>After completing the Advising Workshop and working with an adviser, students will be able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Describe the sequencing of English and math courses. • Determine qualification to enroll in a particular course. • Describe the general education requirements of selected Associate Degree (if applicable). • Research and select a career path. • Interpret a degree audit. • Complete the Steps for Success component of the individual learning plan. • Use the online advising system to complete a two-semester plan. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advising Workshop (1st Semester) • Advising appointment* with faculty adviser (required) <p>*This may be face-to-face, by phone, or by email.</p> |

Strategy 3: Program Review

The purpose of this strategy is to “align academic and student support programs to enhance student academic success” (TCC, n.d.a). TCC, along with the advice of an outside consultant, determined that the “culture of evidence needs to be strengthened to meet the needs of our students in the admission, enrollment,

advisement and registration processes” (TCC, 2008g, p. 32). The focus has been on defining, assessing, and modifying student support programs including developing learning outcome questions for student evaluation forms completed following the student success seminars and advising workshops. All first-time-in-college (FTIC) degree-seeking students are required to attend the advising workshop prior to meeting with their faculty advisor. The purpose of the workshop is designed “just to help them [students] continue to get comfortable with the online tools and start mapping out their courses so that when they go to the faculty advisor they’ve already had time to think about what they want to major in...so the faculty member isn’t starting that conversation from scratch” (Interviewee #15).

Strategy 4: Strategic Knowledge Management

This fourth Achieving the Dream strategy was to develop “a strategic knowledge management system to monitor student performance, determine problems, and identify interventions...the system will provide early and ongoing knowledge and communication to students, faculty, staff, and administrators on student progress and the effectiveness of academic support programs” (TCC, 2008g, p. 35). Under this strategy, five portals (Board of Trustees, student known as TCC Passport, faculty and staff, Community Partners, and presentations) were created to “facilitate access to and use of information by the respective stakeholders” (TCC, 2008g, p. 37). Additionally, this strategy is focused on “giv[ing] end-users increase access to data for creation of their own reports on programs and institutional effectiveness” (TCC, 2008g, p. 37) through data warehouses.

Strategy 5: Policies and Procedures

The fifth and final Achieving the Dream strategy is to “implement policies and procedures that support student success” (TCC, n.d.a). Under this strategy, college committees reviewed the policies and procedures related to their purview and recommended modifications. Several changes were implemented including:

“academic standards metric recognition for college prep and part-time students, suspension/probation being printed on a student’s transcript, revision of mandatory advising requirements, revision of orientation process, and redesigning the catalog to match the process of the learning plan” (TCC, 2008g, pp. 38-39). This strategy is now being expanded to include separating policies from procedures and developing an online searching manual (TCC, 2008g).

As well as the work under the five strategies, TCC participated with Public Agenda in community conversations with Gadsden County citizens (part of TCC’s service area). Nearly 60 citizens participated, and the agenda was “The Purposes of Education.” This engagement initiative was in response to reports of alarming infant mortality, high unemployment, failing schools, and escalating high school drop-outs. From the community input, a 10-point action plan was developed to increase high school graduates and college going students, increase scholarships, establish partnerships for after school and summer programs, support the Gadsden schools to move from “A” to “B” levels, start and strengthen workforce programs, increase economic development, improve healthcare, support community organizations, and write grants in order to obtain additional resources to improve education. Over the past three years, TCC helped to secure more than \$16 million to support the Gadsden County initiatives (TCC, 2008g, n.d.d). In February 2009, TCC was recognized by the Lumina Foundation for “its broad engagement strategy, specifically its outreach to the residents of Gadsden County” (Achieving the Dream, n.d.).

The strategies under Achieving the Dream represent a very aggressive agenda for TCC. The funding was a total of \$400,000 over four years. Several of the activities may not have required an outlay of dollars, but they did require an enormous amount of personnel commitment, research, and time and the ability to take a fresh look. In 2006, McPhail provided the following observation to TCC:

The mission and/or vision of the college do not change as a result of the Achieving the Dream initiative. The way(s) people execute the mission changes. Encourage college leaders to empower stakeholders to stop worrying so much about “fixing” the student; encourage them to consider ways to *change the institution* to respond to the diverse learning needs of the students. (McPhail, 2006, p. 3)

This comment succinctly describes the work that TCC undertook with their Achieving the Dream initiatives and strategies. The institution’s mission was not changing, but rather operational areas and programs were changed to better meet the student’s needs.

Title III – Pathways to Success

A new road map to student success is transforming the way Tallahassee Community College is serving its students. TCC’s Pathways to Success Title III program is increasing independent learning, student retention, and graduation by providing extra resources that allow greater learning opportunities.

(President Law, TCC, Pathways’ Brochure)

Tallahassee Community College (TCC) was awarded the Title III – Strengthening Institutions grant by the U.S. Department of Education in October 2006 with funding of \$1.8 million to occur over five years. The purpose of the grant program is to assist higher education institutions in “improve[ing] their academic programs,

institutional management, and fiscal stability in order to increase their self-sufficiency and strengthen their capacity to make a substantial contribution to the higher education resources of the Nation” (U.S. Department of Education, n.d., p. 231). The TCC program, Pathways to Success, builds on the institution’s quality enhancement plan and the Achieving the Dream grant. The program focuses on two key efforts: the re-engineering of student support and tracking services and the redesign of the developmental studies curriculum and learning assistance programs (TCC, n.d.j). Two external evaluators reviewed the progress of the Title III grant initiatives after two years, they describe the program and related outcomes are described as a two-prong approach:

First, the project focuses on the re-engineering of student services using a customer-service paradigm, enhancing new student services and intake assessments, with subsequent course placement. A one-stop process will guide students from admission through registration. An early warning and intervention system and improved advising system will contribute to student persistence. Second, in tandem with these improvements, the upper and lower levels of the developmental education curriculum will be redesigned, bolstered by course delivery modifications in basic courses to promote student achievement. By the end of Year 5, the Activity will lead to a 5% increase in fall-to-spring persistence; a 20% increase in fall-to-fall retention; a 20% increase in the success of developmental students in college courses; and a 10% increase in the graduation rate. (TCC, n.d.i, p. 4)

The external evaluators reflected on the customer service paradigm as “an important facet of the re-engineering...[because it] acknowledges the importance of front-line staff in maintaining and sustaining connectivity with students” (TCC, n.d.i, p. 7). To this regard, student affairs staff participated in three days of customer service training focused on communicating with diverse students, working with a variety of

ages, and handling difficult situations. Additionally, they are exploring best practices for improving processes and developing cross training activities.

Several areas referenced throughout the researcher's interviews were funded in some capacity through the Title III grant including new student orientation activities; advising guide, syllabus, and training; information technology costs related to individual learning plans; assessment of the one-stop shop concept; employee training and development; and the redesign of the developmental education curriculum including the Student Success Course. Also these initiatives are linked, and in some cases overlap the projects that were partially funded through the Achieving the Dream grant.

As previously noted, the second prong of the Title III, Pathways to Success project, is the redesign of the developmental education or college preparation curriculum. The redesigned courses will be fully implemented in fall 2009 following a pilot of selected technology solutions and delivery methods. The redesign process included a self-study, research of best practices, and open conversations. The process is described by Dr. Sally Search, Title III Activity Director and Dean of Academic Support Programs:

The members [developmental faculty] have assessed programs and courses, identified strengths and weaknesses, researched best practices and taken a holistic approach to the design and development of the curricula. The redesigned developmental program is framed by O'Banion's *Principles of the Learning College*; course development in each area is guided by Gamson and Chickering's *Seven Principles for Good Practice in Higher Education*. Essential to the redesign is a student development component based on TCC's Teacher/Learner Continuum. (TCC, n.d.j, p. 6)

The grant is in its third year. The external evaluation report for 2007-2008 reported significant progress with “the energy generated by the work of the second year will continue to make a difference, both in the pace of change in the overall impact of the effort” (TCC, n.d.i, p. 21). The report concluded with “you’re making terrific strides and you’ve just begun to deliver on the promise of organizational transformation and increased student success” (TCC, n.d.i, p. 24).

Section 4 - The Qualitative Analysis

Prior to the first visit to Tallahassee Community College (TCC), in January 2009, several phone discussions and numerous emails were exchanged with the TCC point of contact, Scott, Balog, Director of Institutional Research. The researcher arrived the day prior to her scheduled visit in order to acclimate herself with the college and the campus layout. Large directional signage was immediately apparent, making getting lost a remote probability. The signage gave a strong impression of a very student oriented and customer friendly campus culture. During the researcher’s numerous treks across campus during this visit and the next, it was evident that the signage was placed strategically, addressing both major and non-major thoroughfares. Such details definitely applied to the vision of getting students to class in the best shape possible - -without being frustrated by not locating the proper building.

The researcher made a second visit to TCC in March 2009 to complete her interviews. Over both visits, 23 individual interviews and one focus group of four faculty members (these focus group members are considered as interviewees for the

remainder of this study) were conducted. Four additional interviewees participated in telephone interviews. From the total of 31 interviewees, eight participated in multiple dialogues with the researcher. During the process, the TCC constituents who were interviewed and participated in the focus group included:

- President William (Bill) Law
- Chair of the Board of Trustees
- Vice Chair of the Board of Trustees
- Member of the Board of Trustees
- Vice President of Academic Affairs
- Vice President for Information Technology
- Vice President for Student Affairs
- Assistant Vice President of the Law Enforcement Academy
- Deans (4)
- Department Chairs (2)
- Director of Achieving the Dream
- Director for Center of Teaching Excellence
- Director of Educational Research
- Director of Enrollment Services & Testing
- Director of Financial Aid
- Director of Grants
- Director of Institutional Research
- Director of Student Success Center
- Faculty (5)
- Students (3)
- Achieving the Dream Coach, Dr. Christine McPhail

Two interview protocols (see Appendices A and B), one for students and one for all others, guided the interviews, but the sessions were intended to be conversations and were not forced to follow any boundaries. Each participant signed a consent form (see Appendix C) with the intention that every attempt would be made to ensure that their comments would not be identifiable. To this end, a random numbering system was prepared and throughout the remainder of this treatise all interview comments will be referenced by number. The only exceptions are President Law and Dr. Christine McPhail. They are identified by name and/or title due to their unique position and relationship within the institution. In some cases, board members are identified by their title, but most times they were referenced as interviewee. Student interviewees are referenced in Section 5, Student Portal and Individual Learning Plans.

The transcripts from these interviews totaled 651 pages of text. The researcher listened to each tape while reviewing the corresponding transcript in order to ensure text accuracy. In the second review of the transcripts, the reviewer began content analysis by highlighting interviewee comments on various topics. For non-student interviewees, a topical master file was created from these highlighted comments, and another review of each transcript was completed to ensure that all topical comments had been categorized. The categories were reviewed for similarities and distinctions, and a final listing of significant themes was compiled. Finally, the researcher reviewed the tapes focusing on tone and extralinguistic cues that might contribute additional meaning to the interviewees' comments (Dean, 2003).

A similar but less structured process was used to synthesize the information obtained from the following meetings in which the researcher participated as an observer:

- Walk through session for Board of Trustees' workshop and Board meeting
- Board of Trustees' workshop
- Board of Trustees' board meeting
- Strategic Forum meeting
- Budget Development meeting
- Achieving the Dream Team meeting
- Student Recruitment and Enrollment Strategies meetings (2)

During these meetings, the researcher took detailed notes and observed verbal and nonverbal communications. Similar to the process described above, these notes were reviewed and comments were highlighted for similarities and contrasts to the individual interviews.

The following eight themes emerged as areas discussed or views expressed by the interviewees.

- 1) Leadership style of the president and the board relationship
- 2) The vision – student success
- 3) Transparency and open communications
- 4) Strategic plan
- 5) Budget
- 6) Data and information technology
- 7) People and development
- 8) Sustainability of the shared vision

It was these themes that “identified core consistencies and meanings” (Patton, 2002, p. 453) from the interviews. Furthermore, these themes became essential in understanding the experiences and passions of the interviewees and the quests and hopes for TCC and its students. The next sections will describe each theme, the context in which it was addressed by participants, and supporting interviewee quotes.

Theme 1: Leadership Style of the President and the Board Relationship

The leadership style of the president and the board relationship are addressed together in this section because of the significant role that each party plays in setting the direction and vision of Tallahassee Community College (TCC). The messages communicated from both the President and the Board of Trustees are consistent, and the cohesion between the President and the Board was obvious to most of the interviewees.

Leadership Style of the President. The president is a highly respected individual who has been influential in moving the institution to the next level. All of the non-student interviewees provided thick descriptions of President Law, his passions, energy, vision, and leadership style. One commented, “One of the reasons I came to TCC was because of Dr. Law” (Interviewee #7). Several commented on the contrast of this president with the previous president. Some suggested that the previous president focused on building the campus’ facilities while this president is focusing on building the capacity. These same people commented that there is a time for each type of leader, and each has had a crucial role in TCC’s history. One Board interviewee described the president’s accomplishments:

The catalyst that we thought he would be as far as innovation, receptivity to new ideas, thoughts, and suggestions, and involvement in a three county area....All that together has made a real difference in where we have been and where we are now. (Interviewee #2)

The president is described as a visionary and change agent. Several interviewees referenced the impact of being such a leader and the related speed of change. One participant commented:

He has a vision – he shows that vision. Sometimes you have to go slow to go fast. That is one of his expressions. When change comes, you got to know when to pull and yank, and when to let up and give people time to catch up. He has a pretty good idea about that. (Interviewee #8)

This interviewee also contrasted the university or the academy as “the cradle of creativity but when you work with faculty change comes slow.” To illustrate this point, this same interviewee and several others referenced an example with the learning college:

Many faculty did not get turned on – they were turned off by the learning college. I believe he [President Law} gave all of the Strategic Forum group copies of the book [O’Banion’s *A Learning College for the 21st Century*]. We don’t use those terms, but nonetheless, some of the concepts we use...a change of focusing on the learning college to focusing on student success. (Interviewee #8)

Another interviewee commented that the concepts were significant not the terminology: “He doesn’t care about the terminology [of the learning college]—that stuff doesn’t matter to him, but the concepts of the learning centered institution were important to him” (Interviewee 12). Later, in a conversation with President Law, he reiterated passionately that his focus is on the principles of the learning college and focusing on the student and not on terminology:

It became a real cause célèbre out here... Finally I said, 'I'm tired of listening to this.' Let's just say 'Merry Christmas' now instead of learning college. Every time you want to talk about this, say 'Merry Christmas.' That way we don't have to argue about what does that mean. Here are the five principles. Anyone against the principles? Well if you like the principles and you don't like the name that's why we're going to use 'Merry Christmas.' If you're against the principles you need to speak up and then we adopted them and put them in and everything else....I distanced myself from the mindless dialogue.... I ran right to the principles. But don't let the language take over. (personal communication, March 3, 2009)

Along these same lines, President Law was characterized as passionate, intense, committed, dynamic, and at times forceful. "I will say he is very aggressive in his agenda in the sense that there is a lot to do" (Interviewee #12). Another interviewee comments on his passion and commitment:

There is no doubt that this institution has made huge strides since 2002...Bill's commitment to students is evident – I think he cares very passionately about students and about the institution. But for a few people, it doesn't come across right. That is very sad. (Interviewee #9)

This same level of passion and commitment was referenced in discussions regarding the community. One interviewee states,

I think President Law's commitment to the community is unique. He understands the role that the community college plays in economic development, in workforce development, in cultural events, and he sees that value here. I think he has brought renewed energy and commitment to Gadsden County. (Interviewee #3)

Several interviewees including board members referenced his focus on workforce and economic development as a key consideration for selecting him as president for TCC. One interviewee explains, "He was hired by this board to get work force development

going – that was his expertise and that was what he was known for. This small liberal arts faculty didn't understand that" (Interviewee #12).

The term "overachiever" was used to describe Dr. Law, but the term was used in reference to many on the team who had caught the vision. Multiple references were made about the amount of work that needs done; but generally that was coupled with what the institution had accomplished and a sense of urgency of what needs done in the future. The energy and excitement was clear in this interviewee's voice as he/she said, "We are a bunch of overachievers and then having a president --- he is a marathon runner, and he is constantly thinking of big things.... We have so many ideas. The staff is constantly giving ideas. Let's do this – let's do that. It is great" (Interviewee #7). Another interviewer referenced the president's interest in long distance running as a way to offset his intense commitment to work, "He runs marathons and he listens to books on his iPod that is his relaxation. At work, he is all work" (Interviewee #16).

Several interviewees commented on the president's hands-on approach, his awareness, interest, and involvement, especially with faculty. This approach for someone at his level was noted as surprising, unusual, weird, and fascinating:

- He knows what is going on in the different areas. You could ask him about any faculty member, and he would be able to tell you what that faculty member is working on, and what they do. I like that approach. (Interviewee #16)
- Dr. Law is unusual; he wants to meet with every faculty interviewed. Normally, we interview seven applicants per faculty position. He wants to talk to them about the college and find out what they have done. He even meets with them on Saturdays because his schedule is so busy. He doesn't give us any feedback. He does not influence the process. This is a shared governance institution and he understands that but he wants to meet them. A couple of years ago we hired 16

new faculty with six to seven applicants for each. That is a lot of time. (Interviewee #16)

- “He visits their classes, and they thought that was weird. He interviews everybody [faculty], and they thought that was weird” (Interviewee #12).
- “The other thing that is quite fascinating to me is that our president goes in and observes everyone in the class in the third year” (Interviewee #10).
- Faculty were not used to a president who was interested in student learning and setting up values based around that and what the expectations were of what was happening in the classroom. [President] Law never crosses the line about curriculum, any of those issues – it’s only about how are we serving our students. (Interviewee #12)

Other comments used to describe him were student focused, tech geek, and planner. The following comments came from four different interviewees, and each will be explained in greater detail in their respective theme sections (the vision – student success, strategic plan, and data and information technology).

- “[President] Law is also very active with students -- he gets right in the middle of it and is proud of them” (Interviewee #16).
- “He is just a tech geek...a tech guy, and he said you don’t have that long – let’s get it up and running” (Interviewee #11).
- “He is a very, very good planner, which is why we are in as good a shape now as we are compared to the rest of the colleges in the state [related to reduced funding]” (Interviewee #9).
- “To me, with Dr. Law, we have become the planning institution. I really and honestly believe we have a plan. We are not hit and miss, we are really looking at things. We are regularly examining data” (Interviewee #13).

Board Relationships. In the researcher’s interview with President Law, he stressed the importance of board relationships and the clear difference between the roles of the board and the president. He stated, “I really believe that the Board has to own the

strategic plan, the Board has to own the annual budget, and the Board has to evaluate the president...Real ownership --- not vote for what the president puts in front of you” (personal communication, January 27, 2009). One employee interviewee commented that President Law “works really hard in getting them involved and engaged in board related or board necessary activities. They seem to be a very good, strong working group” (Interviewee #17). Another contrasted the past and the present:

In the old days, I think as I read the minutes -- I didn’t attend board meetings-- but everything was set and everything was affirmative. At the Board meetings we go to now, there is a lot of good discussion that goes on. These people are engaged in that data, and sometimes they have some very good points to bring forth. (Interviewee #8)

In interviews with members of the Board of Trustees, they too stressed the importance of buy-in, ownership, engagement, involvement, and defined relationships between the board, the chief executive officer, and operations. Interestingly, many of the adjectives used to describe the president were similar to those found in the Board member’s description of themselves. One provided an example in regards to ownership and engagement:

You can have a board of trustees just simply as a time stamp on ideas or agendas that are presented to them by the college administration, or you can have a board like ours that is very creative, very imaginative, all plugged in, and involved in their communities to a great degree. They are active and focused on trying to implement change that makes sense for education and economics of the institution and the core of the organization. (Interviewee #2)

This same board member added, “We don’t do the day-to-day stuff. That is not the purpose of the board, we don’t think anyway. When it [an issue] comes up, we have

workshops on it prior to it coming to a vote so we know where the funding is going, and it is explained in relationship to our priorities and strategies” (Interviewee #2).

Another trustee discussed the importance of understanding the delicate balance between roles and responsibilities. “Trustees are responsible for direction and policy, support of the president, faculty, [and] staff; and I think we are a link with the community...we are the voice of the face that interlinks the community and the academic environment” (Interviewee #3).

This same board member clarified the distinction even more thoroughly and stressed the importance of counseling, conferring, and mutual respect between the president and his board members.

At every point he confers with his trustees in making major decisions. I don’t want us to ever play in his sandbox. This is his faculty, this is his staff. We expect and know that he will fulfill that role, and he keeps us informed. And he asks our opinion when appropriate, and he takes our counsel with great dedication....I can tell you that I sit on thirteen boards, and his commitment to this is extraordinary. (Interviewee #3)

A Reflection on the Past. President Law is within ten years of retirement and has had a successful career at leading several community colleges. At a national level, he is highly respected and viewed as a leader, innovator, and driver of change. The researcher asked him, “When you came to Tallahassee Community College, how did you get started – what was wrong here?” He responded:

First of all, it was mostly right. The fundamental instructional program was very sound....there were two or three things that had to change. They had no commitment to work force education, and clearly, I was hired to do that....Secondly, though, there was no plan....For me that is not the way I move

an institution. I can't do that – I just don't know how to do that, you know? And there were weak systems. (personal communication, January 27, 2009)

These fervent tenets are important for the reader to bear in mind as he/she continues through the remainder of the themes.

Theme 2: The Vision – Student Success

President Law referenced student success in every conversation that he had with the researcher. It was evident in every meeting that she attended and every interview she conducted that student success was the underlying and overarching focus at the institution. As one interviewee stated, “Everywhere we go now, that is the conversation....Everything is related to providing student success” (Interviewee #15).

As the researcher spoke with President Law, it was clear that he is proud of the progress being made at Tallahassee Community College. It is also clear that he is adamant about student success and changing the numbers. The researcher asked him about his preparation for taking on the student success agenda. He reflected a moment and then responded passionately:

It is a lifelong concern that I have with student success. When I first started graduate school it was summer of 1972 so we had just come out of the student riots of the 60s and 70s.... We get to the student development course, and it became clear that the people involved in student development learned nothing from all of the riots and there was no engagement. We never defused emergent situations. We weren't listening to students, and when we had a chance to legitimately pull the energy out, we never listened to students on campus. We never had a concern. There was never a plan to focus; and then, of course, it's a little like buying a car. Once you buy a car, every car on the road is the same color as yours and then when you see that you say, look at these student services, they're not engaging anyone here....

So as I developed my career, it's always a variation of the same thing, we're here if students can find us. At times it would be better than others, but with each passing day it gets less supportable to do that....if you don't do it, what happens? And when you have an inordinate number of students who come to you as first in their family,They [the community and the college] wake up one day, and now they're predominately Black and Hispanic. What happens when an immigrant Hispanic family sends their brightest daughter to college, and she doesn't make it for reasons that could have been fixed? She's certainly college ready, but the system overwhelms her. The dialogue in that family now is, 'See, our family doesn't go to college. What are we going to do with her brother who is 14 who was never quite as good a student?' There are all these things that are cultural, but then they're individualized, and the idea that students who get to us are somehow weeded out....That's why I just think the whole version of student services is always behind the times and settled in. And I think in the end, the message is...if that group [student services] doesn't own the student retention issue, who does? Ownership means how are we going to change? (personal communication, March 3, 2009)

A shared vision requires that people understand it and see how they are a part of it. President Law explains his perspective of the student success vision, "Everybody can repeat it on campus. Everybody sees they are a part of it" (personal communication, January 27, 2009). Including all, creating that sense of ownership, establishing responsibility, and recognizing that each person must focus on student success resonated from every interviewee. One interviewee with a long history at the college contrasted this clear student success focus from leadership to earlier work being done at the institution:

When we did the quality enhancement plan, which was to improve student success, we had already done one study on student learning and that was before Dr. Law got here. Some things were building, but it was almost quietly and not out in the open, and it certainly wasn't coming from leadership. Faculty wasn't that affected by it. (Interviewee #12)

The following comments explain how the student success message is reaching employees throughout the organization:

All of our focus is on how do we help the student be successful... and it's not just what we do or what the faculty does, it's what we all do as an institution.... They all might have a little bit different take on it, but we all know why we are here and that's to help students get through this process and accomplish their goal, whatever that goal may be. That is the piece that looks different for different types of students. I think the message has been translated down to the layers well enough that it is not just the administrative team sharing that, and everyone else is clueless. I think how they present it and their take on it might vary, depending on where they are in the institution and what they do day to day. (Interviewee #15)

We also have...I guess I'd call [it] Dr. Law's matrix: where it's everyone's job to get students to classes in the best condition for learning and a seat in the classroom is not enough. Those have really had a strong impact in that they are a little more accessible and easy to remember, than say the college mission statement. I think those things form our shared vision....(Interviewee #17)

They finish what they start. We have several mantras that float around campus. It depends which one fits the speech at the moment. That access provides opportunity. That degrees and certificates change lives. And of course retention, but retention goes back to finishing what you start...The expectations [include] students, the faculty, the staff, and the groundskeepers. Everybody is responsible for getting the students to class in the condition for learning and that means that they shouldn't have to walk through trash on the grounds...[and] they shouldn't have extremely long lines. (Interviewee #27)

Well, I've seen it embraced across the campus. My staff gets it. The students come first. When we had the catastrophic failure, the programmer said [that] he got the system up, but then he had to go look at the students who paid yesterday so we could contact them. That was his first response. They all get it. (Interviewee #11)

This faculty is very diverse. They never all agree on any one thing. I think overwhelmingly that they believe that student success is important...We are all about students. We are not about anything else. ...There are different ways of reaching student success, but I think the system we have right now is one that the faculty seem to be very comfortable with. (Interviewee #16)

One interviewee went into detail on how a student success focus has impacted the institution and more importantly his/her office:

When the president came here...the two things he [the President] said was, ‘A student is a student is a student, and if we are not teaching, how can we get the student to the classroom in the best condition for learning.’ We are getting tattoos all over this building! We embrace that, and when you think about it, how can we get them there? If you really think about that concept of getting students from here to the classroom that means that they should not be worrying that their transfer was not evaluated correctly. That means that financial aid should have been processed. There were no payment issues. We provided them with good customer service because if the student is in a classroom and is worrying about all these things, then we are missing the point. The staff has truly embraced the fact that we need to do everything we can because we are part of their learning experience. Once they leave this office that is the goal. You have taken care of that student thoroughly....In that sense, even though we are not teaching, we are part of the school. (Interviewee #7)

The above interviewee discussed taking care of the student thoroughly. Other interviewees referenced the need to realize the differences among students and developing holistic approaches:

It is holistic – it is not piece meal. What I have seen in other institutions and prior to my current position ... there are wonderful pockets of excellence. That’s good and we appreciate that, but we want holistic student success where the pockets turn into a suit of armor. (Interviewee #3)

“We are taking a holistic approach to students and make sure that we incorporate the student development aspect of that...” (Interviewee #9).

From orientations perspective, how do we prepare students to be successful in their first semester here? We are just in this right now having a conversation about a new theme for upcoming summer orientations. It is going to be called Just Ask. What is the attitude for the student to be successful? What are the skills that we need and know of at TCC? What is the knowledge that we have that they need in their first semester about policies and procedures? We are going to build a program around that, Just Ask (Attitude, Skills and Knowledge). (Interviewee #15)

A Board member discussed the Board's expectation for holistic solutions to ensure student success including that facility and infrastructure issues are not impeding success:

I can definitely say that the Board was very supportive in some of the measures that we put in place to insure that these students were successful when they got here in terms of how we handled them in enrollment. If there is a long registration line or students were dissatisfied, that was not acceptable. This was definitely holistic because the Board wanted answers...I will never forget in a workshop in 2005, we were discussing retention processes on campus. I had been out on campus, it had just rained, and there were pools of water everywhere. The first thing I thought about is, it's nice – you know, when you're a board member you get to park up front, you don't have to worry about anything. But if I was a student, and I had to park in the general parking lot, I would have looked at all of this water. Knowing that I would have to wade through it to get to class, I would probably have thought twice about attending class that day. We looked at infrastructure issues that could have been an impediment for learning. (Interviewee #1)

One interviewee discusses the need for student engagement, involvement, and opportunities outside the classroom.

'Three hours a week in a seat in a classroom is not enough for our students [a famous Dr. Law statement]'...we are trying to provide other opportunities outside the classroom for students to be focused on the course material and provide support that way to help them. You don't have to lower standards, but you get them [students] more on task. (Interviewee #8)

This interviewee continued by explaining the roles that both the student and the faculty play in student success.

I think the big change in the old days in education, when I went to school, there was a professor and there was the student. Realizing that we are all in this together, working together so that the student can be successful. I think – we can call that student success but also the issue is not a power play between a professor and a student, and we need, within reason, not letting the student run over you, but within reason, treat them as equals in this process. They have different roles, don't misunderstand me. We are all working together. People

laugh at this statement but you know, the sage on the stage approach. Compared to someone helping you get along and get towards your goal. (Interviewee #8)

Another interviewee with a long tenure at the institution discussed student success in terms of the independent learner and helping students individually.

I have been her for every president that TCC [Tallahassee Community College] had. The huge shift has been in the size of the school; we use to be two tiny buildings when I started. Even though we have become a bigger school, we are still using the emphasis of being like a small school and trying to help students individually. That is very much our focus. This notion of student success, and all the things we do to work students to being independent learners, I don't see it as that different from our focus originally; but it has been harder to maintain with the size of our population. But nevertheless, our student advisors and our faculty, and everyone really focus on this as the priority. It is just challenging to carry it all off the way we would want to. (Interviewee #16)

One faculty member explained that the student success message is clearly communicated internally and externally. Additionally, this interviewee gained a broader perspective on how the components throughout the college work together rather than in isolation to accomplish the student success vision:

I think we have focused on the student's success from all of our marketing on down. That message is portrayed. The thing that was most evident to me when we were first indoctrinated [to TCC] – and I'm not saying this in a negative connotation – was how my role as a classroom instructor was fitting in to the student's overall success. Between helping them finish whatever they set out to do, be it that semester or their degree, or certificate, and knowing how every other portion of the college was interacting to help with that, from the administration to our support services to the content areas. I come from teaching public high school [where] that isolation occurs, and it was my job to help them get done with the math course. My perspective has completely broadened – yes my job is to help them with the math course; but also in the bigger picture, to earn a degree or whatever it is that they are here for...That is one of the things that I was most impressed by. (Interviewee #24)

Two interviewees discussed the focus is on developing student support systems that are aligned and service oriented. One interviewee explained that this is no small feat. “We’ve been doing it for years – aligning the systems” (Interviewee #7). And another explained the focus in his/her area is to get “more things that are service oriented [rather] than process oriented” (Interviewee #15).

The messages from these interviewees were clear – students are the priority, and their success cannot be achieved in isolation – it takes every department and division working towards the same shared vision.

Measuring Student Success. The researcher asked each interviewee, “How is student success measured?” While the question is short and appears quite simple, some responses were quite lengthy. Several interviewees referenced the principle that ‘students finish what they start,’ but then they elaborated on how to translate that into action in their respective work areas:

OK – from my prospective – the easy answer to that is students finish what they start – I’m sure you heard that. Each of us has to talk about what that means in our areas. In academic areas, for me obviously, it means that they get into the right courses; they have a plan for what they want to do; we help them modify their plan if they are not successful; they get the help they need along the way in terms of student support services; and they end up a self directed graduate, or having met their goal. (Interviewee #12)

I define it with how well the student does in subsequent courses....We can define success by do the students get to their upper institution transfers. We can also define [it] in Dr. Law’s terms – do they finish what they start? I think where that is important is when you are looking at withdrawal rates. (Interviewee #8)

Let the students finish what they start. That could be a course, a semester, a degree. Always looking at - a student may come here just to take a course and if they fill at the end of that, they have been successful, then we have done our job.

That is a lot harder to measure by accountability measures and state reporting. Looking at it from the course level, and that is why you see such an emphasis of decreasing withdrawal rates. (Interviewee #15)

Complete what they start. I can look at a grade and say you failed the course, but did you complete the class? Some students are completing a course – they may not have gotten anything in there to get a passing grade, but they will come back and they will do fine. Completing what you start is what I consider a success rate (Interviewee #18)

As expected many translated their responses into a variety of measures that are being monitored at Tallahassee Community College:

Generally, we have defined student success in terms of our first time in college tracking study as the ABC rates. You can't call it the formal definition – this is success – that is one of indicators that we are tracking (Interviewee #17)

...we [deans] would never look at one term but over several terms we would be concerned about both ends. Not just the low end, but also the high end (Interviewee #8)

In our dean's program review pieces, we look at the enrollment plan and how many students we got in. We look at ABC rates. We also look at how students are moving through the system – where they are dropping out – where the issues are. Sometimes there are faculty issues. I always try to separate our student success from individual faculty issues. You are always going to have someone who has the lowest GPA – you're always going to have someone who has the top GPA. Probably both of those are wrong, but I don't know what the right one is. What you need to do is not talk about those to your group. You talk about are we all measuring the same thing – are we all teaching the same course – are learning outcomes the same – then you talk about classroom policies – are they working or not in terms of retention and success. Are we agreeing on what students know when they get out of this course? That is not individually threatening. Then a dean in an individual assessment of a faculty member has to talk to a faculty member who has the lowest approval rating, drop-out rate, and the lowest GPA. (Interviewing #12)

I would say one way is how they perform on the exit test...Another way of course is pass/fail. How many students actually passed the entire course with an A, B, or C. Another way is retention (Interviewee #19)

For me, it is more of the ABC kind of thing. Also, if we can get the students to come back the next semester. That is a major thing to me. We want to create a positive enough environment for the students, and even if they get a C or B or whatever, then they are returning the next semester also. They see it as part of their goals. (Interviewee #13)

Several mentioned that not one measure can be used, and one interviewee said, “There are lots of ways it is measured” (Interviewee #16). One board member gave a perspective of the many aspects that formulate student success measures, “Well, what we are doing would be very difficult to measure in one little package for success” (Interviewee #2). Another interviewee expressed a similar measurement issue from the perspective of the faculty, “I think that our faculty wants our students to be successful – they also worry a little bit about being looked at as to what that success rate is” (Interviewee #8).

The faculties’ concern over how student success is measured in light of maintaining academic standards was a topic mentioned by several interviewees. One faculty member discussed student success in terms of the balance between empathy and academic standards:

It is the empathy in preparing them [students] for whatever their goal is...We have to find that balance of caring about students, but remembering that we have an end goal and they have an end goal. Standards have to be high while we are holding their hands to get them to that point [of success]. (Interviewee #25)

Another interviewee agreed that there must be the commitment to both. “We learn every year. It is a continual process to keep that balance in check. We hold the standards” (Interviewee #26).

All interviewees admitted that striving for student success is not any easy process, and several used the term “continuous improvement process.” One interviewee believed that a good indication of progress is “when other people come to you to look at what you are doing – all the numbers are there but when people start saying that they want to see how TCC is doing it, that means we are there” (Interviewee #12).

Theme 3: Transparency & Open Communications

Transparency and open communications is a theme that was discussed by nearly all of the interviewees. Many from this group still expressed surprise as they recalled the first big moment of transparency that occurred in 2002 when the new president published the budget for all to see. One interviewee describes the surprise:

Some had to learn a different way of doing things.... He wanted to get much more involved. He didn't want to topple down the administration. This guy [president], first thing he wanted to do was publish the budget. The budget was held as tight as it could be. People who had the budget information and keys on this campus were the people in control. He opened all of that up. (Interviewee #12)

Another reflective interviewee describes the first time the budget was posted for all employees to review and its impact:

I can remember when he took the college budget and put it on the web so anyone on campus can see it. Not that I had anything to hide, but I thought people would be comparing.... It was really a transformational process in the transparency of everything. As he likes to say when he talks to the Board [and] when he talks to the Strategic Forum....we all have the same numbers. (Interviewee #8)

In addition to the initial public revealing of the budget itself, the budget development process was designed to be just as transparent with all requests for new dollars or reallocations of previously committed dollars going through an open

presentation and discussion process. First, all requests are posted on the faculty and staff portal with a detailed description and analysis and clear tie to the strategic plan. Next, each budget manager presents their requests to the Strategic Forum, which is comprised of approximately 40 middle managers (academic deans and directors), vice presidents, president, and representatives from the faculty and staff organizations. While the meeting is kicked off by President Law, all budget presentations are conducted by the manager responsible for the request. The budget initiatives meetings are open to all who want to attend and are webcasted so that all employees can view, real time or at a subsequent time. One interviewee describes the open, transparent, and collaborative budget process that is linked to student success:

He [President Law] has a very open procedure...we get all the budget managers together, and we all present our new ideas to everyone...The vice presidents have to prioritize these ideas based on available funds. Certainly in that process, ones that have a direct impact on student success get the higher priority. One of Bill Law's questions is, 'How does this next dollar I'm going to spend for this project help the students?'

It didn't work perfectly the first time, but it was a really good way of doing things. It got to the point -- it's not who you know and what power you have to get it -- [but] have we gone through this process. Everyone is part of the process and that is refreshing.

The other thing is if you don't know what anyone's budget is, and you and your supervisor only know what yours is, then it is easier to hold off on these things. If it is all on the table....We'll work together in a consensus mode.... I think before [the transparency], we never quite knew where the money appeared. (Interviewee #8)

The public venue and the streaming video of the budget initiatives workshop are viewed as an opportunity for employees to learn about the college and its vision.

“Anyone on campus who is interested in seeing what their division is presenting or learning more about the college and where we are headed – there is an opportunity – it’s open” (Interviewee #17).

The budget initiatives workshop is just one of the roles of the Strategic Forum. The group meets monthly following the Board of Trustees meeting. Several interviewees referenced the Strategic Forum and its role as a communication conduit:

It’s really to ensure that communication is happening throughout the organization. Anything that is mentioned at the board meeting – that goes back to the transparency of the institution and everything that we do – policy decisions, budget, operation, programming, aligning our services to meet student needs, making sure that everyone in the institution understands the complexity of the issues but also understands all sides --- that nothing is hidden...But also, probing a little bit deeper into questions that may have come up in the board meeting, bringing to light some of the issues that may have been faced...It is flushing out a number of those items. The way to do that is to get everyone into the same room at the same time and talk about it. (Interviewee #14)

The researcher attended a Strategic Forum meeting on one of her visits to TCC. Later that afternoon, an interviewee referenced the meeting as an example of the transparency and bottom-up processes that come to the Forum:

...that openness or that process that you saw today, that is a major transformation under Dr. Law. Everything is transparent – nothing is hidden – it is all out there. When we do budget initiatives, it is from the ground up....coming from the faculty, they are coming to me....It is a very open process. One of the things with Dr. Law, he wants everyone to know everything. (Interviewee #13)

Most interviewees referenced the Strategic Forum and its role in encouraging transparent and open communications. Several interviewees also mentioned the college’s committee structure, the variety of committees that require their participation, and the regular meetings between faculty senate and administration. Ten standing

committees are considered part of the core structure. While the work of the committees is important, the communications from those committees is another component of the transparency created within the college:

That is one thing that we have done a good job of moving forward with has been making sure that committees are working effectively, that there are formal proposals and recommendations that are proposed and moved forward within that structure. What you also see is the message is consistent and clear, and everyone knows what the expectation is. Everyone knows what the definition is. That is one benefit of the core structure. You're able to document all the communication within those committees, and everyone is able to see it. You know what decisions were made about any particular issues. There is no question – there is no data basing via email. (Interviewee #14)

Managers understand their role in communicating the messages provided from their committee work, especially from the work of the Strategic Forum. One manager describes the cascading effect of communications that occur based on the Strategic Forum meeting agenda:

For us, the strategic forum at the administrative level and the directors, we get the big picture presented to us a lot more often than I think the individuals at the lower levels....It is part of my job that they [the employees working in his/her area] don't get so entrenched in the day to day, and we forget the big picture. That is part of what I've tried to do with our staff meetings and in sharing data to make sure that it is just not about the nuts and bolts, but that they understand the big picture and where you feed in to that by what you do every day. (Interviewee #15)

Another way that the college is building on the benefits of the transparent process and open communications is by expanding the information that is available to employees through the use of the faculty and staff portal and access to the Board of Trustees portal. These and the other portals will be discussed in greater detail in the data and information technology theme of this section, but the researcher felt the apparent

goal of the portals in establishing open communications, creating transparency, and providing a way for employees to learn and get more informed was important to note at this point of the study.

Theme 4: Strategic Plan

One of the first documents that the researcher received was the 2007-2010 strategic plan with 2008-2009 goals. The details of the plan were addressed earlier in this chapter. The majority of the participants mentioned the plan during their interview session. It was mentioned in most cases with a sense of pride including being referred to as one of the college's greatest assets and greatest successes. The plan was seen as the framework for the work performed and the initiatives implemented at Tallahassee Community College (TCC).

The three board members interviewed noted the significance of a strategic plan for any organization. It was acknowledged by all interviewed that it reflected the joint work of the Board of Trustees and the leadership team. One board member explained the significance of the plan and the development process:

I think if you ask President Law, he would say that the trustees were integral in making those decisions. I think that certainly the faculty and the vice presidents received recognition of the thirty thousand foot from the trustees who said these are the over-arching strategic directions we want you to go with. Now you come up with plan, back fill that plan to see to it, and bring it back to us. I would say that one of our greatest assets, and also I think one of our greatest successes is having established that strategic plan for this college. (Interviewee #3)

Another explained his/her past experiences with strategic planning and the importance of the plan for TCC:

...I don't know if they had strategic planning before, but every big organization that I have been a part of, we had strategic planning; and that is something that I wanted to implement. It just happened that we did put it together, and Dr. Law was very supportive of that....We have had a strategic planning process for five years or six years since he came on board. And we looked at where are we going to be in twenty-five years, what was this property going to look—we've had strategic planning both for the academic side of it, for the physical plant side.... So, it's very important to us. (Interviewee #2)

The third board member interviewed explained the need for a strategic plan at TCC, especially in light of the changing and global economy. He/She also elaborated on the development process and the need for ownership of the plan:

That is the one thing that I saw was [a need] at the college was us having a strategy as to where TCC was going...While we spent quite a bit of time reflecting on TCC's rich history and where we came from, I was also really focused on terms of where we were going...As we looked at the future and the future is continually changing, how are we preparing our students who are coming out of K-12 for the global economy? How are we preparing our returning students in an economy that is continually changing? We need to be in a position where we have a strategy that related to those concepts...The Board did several months of vision, goals, guidance, principles, and coming up with those types of statements...It was very much reciprocal. It wasn't this is what the Board wants to do [so] deal with it. We wanted to insure that everyone owned this plan. That it just wasn't the Board's plan – this was truly the College's plan and that it withstand administrative changes, board changes, and operational changes. At the end of the day, we wanted to insure that everybody bought into it and believed what this plan said and set out to do. While it began with the Board, it ultimately did go to the core and had some student input as well. (Interviewee #1)

At TCC, the strategic plan is not a document that is developed and put on the shelf until the end of the year. Rather it is actively referred to and used including the

development of multiple versions of the plan to reach numerous audiences. Several interviewees, including the President, mentioned the multiple versions of the strategic plan:

One of the things we did two years ago, we created three different versions of the strategic plan. They were the same, but the way we communicated the components of the plan [were different]. We had one plan that was effective in communicating to public partners or public interests. We had one version that was used in communicating to a family like version. That one includes the actual priority, the goals for that year to help us move towards accomplishing that priority within the 5-year plan, and the actual dollars and source of the resources that are devoted toward accomplishing that particular goal. The challenge for us then becomes measuring our progress towards those and that is where we get into the discussion of developing key performance indicators, working with faculty and administrators across campus to see where they are of the status in their performance goals. (Interviewee #14)

The family version not only lists the eight strategic priorities and the related goals, but it also details specific strategies and activities, amount budgeted, and the related funding source. Various grant-funding streams are listed but other descriptors include new initiative, quality enhancement plan, on-going expense, reallocated, and reallocated from a specific department. This version is distributed to all employees and is considered an important communication piece designed to enhance the commitment to transparency.

The public version is much more succinct in illustrating the priorities and the goals. It features pictures of students and the board of trustees and is clearly designed to provide a quick overview. The third version of the strategic plan provides more narrative than the public version including dollars that were being invested in various areas. It was referred to as the “academic version.”

Several interviewees including President Law and board members commented on how the strategic plan drives the work at TCC, and how that performance is monitored:

The strategic plan is really driving our key performance indicators... I think it can also impact our non-funded initiatives as well. It supports the application for grants and other funding. Whenever we apply for a grant, we always want to make sure it is supporting our strategic plan. (Interviewee #17)

President Law commented on the development, monitoring, and communication processes, but more importantly the alignment and integration of the strategic plan throughout the organization:

...We have what we call the family version of that [strategic plan] too which has all of the projects listed as well....It lists the projects, the funding, and funding source. Highly powerful! If I were giving you some advice, I would give you a variation on this so that people see all the way through the whole process and the Board sees it. I think one of the nice things we've done is share the data then you share the strategies then you share the funding strategies then you say, 'and here's the budget.' The only dialogue then is salary. The rest just falls out. Here's all the projects tied to the strategic goal. You've got three levels -- the platitudinous strategic goals then there are the annual goals within that then there are the strategies within them. Those are tied to a budget activity and the Board can see that. It's really empowering within the institution and the Board loves it. It's their plan. And here's the execution of it and they can talk about the projects. We roll people in to talk about successful ones during the year so then when you do the review of student success you are really just reviewing the projects that are in the budget that they've already signed off on. Look how tightly knit this thing is. (personal communication, March 3, 2009)

Ensuring that the strategic plan drives budget, programming, and operations is a critical alignment issue. The strong link between these components at TCC is described more clearly in the next theme.

Theme 5: Budget

As explained earlier in the leadership theme, Dr. Law is described as a planner, and he is the first to admit that too. President Law emphasizes his credence to planning in light of the systems he found at Tallahassee Community College (TCC) upon his arrival in 2002:

The other mantra that's really important is 'planning matters.' There was no sense in that [in 2002 at Tallahassee Community College]. Just the opposite -- planning doesn't matter. Changing that belief system to where planning matters, 'if it's not on the list it doesn't exist...' The first time we did technology purchases there was a lot of weeping...'in the old days we used to be able to....' I understand the old system but there's a new sheriff in town. Getting the budget discipline together, just being able to describe a complete budget process that people believe in [was a challenge]. (personal communication, March 3, 2009)

While the downturn of late 2008 hit the United States and the world economies with austerity, the leadership at TCC, under the direction of Dr. Law began preparing for this downward spiral much earlier. Some may argue that preparation occurred because the financial volatility reached Florida much earlier with the State suffering budget shortfalls and cutting funding for the State's community colleges. But none the less having the processes in place and developing a conservative budget model are critical for being adequately prepared for the next round of cuts. One interviewee explains the preparation and the budget approval process from the perspective of a board member:

We expect the president and the vice presidents to come to us with a proposed budget. After that, we have an open and very candid conversation, and then the trustees vote on the budget. We've been blessed in that we generally have come to consensus, but we usually take staff recommendations. We know that due diligence has been put into determining it. I love the fact that we are not knee jerking reaction as a board or as a college. We saw it coming a year – two years ago – we started making preparations. The president and vice presidents came

with recommendations. We have a 3-year outlook on what we expect as enrollment numbers. We have a good handle on what our expenses are. I think if you go around this State, you will see that despite the financial situation that this State is in, and is being addressed by our Senate, House, and Governor, that this college is more financially secure than many others. (Interviewee #3)

A second board member elaborates on how the link between the strategic plan and the budget has been instrumental in the institution's preparedness and ability to address the shortfalls from the State:

We were prepared in terms of our planning. We developed the [strategic] plan, and our budget is based on that plan. New programs, if they don't fit into that plan, then we will have to rethink it. We have a strategic plan that we basically live and die by. When you have something that faculty has bought into, that the Board has approved, [and] that administration supports [the] all of these stakeholders have had some say and it [reflects] the vision, mission, beliefs, and guiding principles. And your dollars are associated with that, it makes it a lot easier when you have to make some modifications in your budget or when you have to cut because you have an opportunity to really – basically there are no sacred cows. It can be very fair and judicious in terms of what we have to minimize because at the end of the day, everything has to fall within that auspice of the strategic plan. It has been instrumental to TCC's preparedness for this budget cutting exercise, and subsequent budget cuts, and I think it will carry us to next year. Hard decisions will have to be made, but I think it is going to be very helpful to be able to go back to what we signed up for – here is what everyone said they were going to do – now let's make decisions on how we are going to modify it. (Interviewee #1)

As discussed in the transparency and open communications theme, the budget development process is perceived by the interviewees as a very open and transparent process. All new initiatives are justified and presented to the Strategic Forum and are open to all employees for review and question through the portal system and web streaming. One interviewee commented on the justification process, "...new initiatives

are need based -- it's not just something like the flavor of the month -- it really is something that is justified" (Interviewee #17).

Other important components of the budget development process are repurposing, priorities, and "the list." Dr. Law suggests that repurposing the budget is the secret of any institution and resources should be focused on the bottom line priorities of the institution (personal communication, December 3, 2007). Another interviewee describes how dollars were repurposed following changes and improvements in his/her area of control:

We saved the institution – I think our budget has gone down probably about half a million dollars since I got here. It goes back in the general fund and helps the budgets. When I gave that money back at the end of 2006-2007, which was the first round of budget cuts, we went through and the school was able to reabsorb it. (Interviewee #11)

Another interviewee discusses repurposing resources, the commitment to institutional priorities, and the importance of grant funding:

But the commitment had always been that even as the college as a whole made budget cuts that we were determined that was not going to impact the level of services to the students. The students were not going to know that TCC was in the middle of a budget cut situation. We could cut a million out of our budget, but the students were not going to see that on their end. We really have tried to hold to that commitment. You look at the whole Learning Commons [a new comprehensive learning center], even though the institution took budget cuts in other areas, the Learning Commons came on board this fall with all the programming, including a new student success person housed over there full-time. While we took hits in other areas, we didn't suffer [in services] to the student. It has forced us to think more creatively, it has forced us to evaluate other things that we were doing that we just can't do anymore, [and] to target our resources in other areas. I don't think there would be a student who walked through these doors that didn't receive service and that would know that we were down a counselor or two. We have adjusted – we use part-time personnel....It seems to be all glum in the State about budget cuts. While it is beginning to get a

little tight and we all want more money, we've been able to use ATD [Achieving the Dream] dollars to help support our program, and we've been able to use Title III dollars to help support our program. The rest has been an evaluation of what can we do with the resources that we have and what is giving us the most to help our students. (Interviewee #15)

A third interviewee discussed the challenges of prioritizing many great ideas with limited resources, "It is challenging – having all of those ideas and prioritizing them. What can we do right now that is key without forgetting other great ideas? We can't do everything right now" (Interviewee #7) A fourth acknowledged a similar concern, "it's no one's fault [but] I get concerned about the level of service we'll be able to provide to the students" (Interviewee #20).

Several interviewees talked about "the list" which is part of Dr. Law's composition as a planner. Most interviewees explained that Dr. Law does not want to be hit with surprises during the year thus requiring all anticipated budget needs to be on the list during the budget development process. Some interviewees joked about the list, but all took it as a budget tenet. One interviewee enlightened the researcher about the list: "...I want to emphasis is 'if it's not on the list, it won't get funded. That doesn't mean that halfway through the year, if a piece of equipment goes bad, there are funds set aside for emergency repairs or emergency replacements. That is part of the budget process" (Interviewee #8). This interviewee also referenced the planner aspect of Dr. Law, and he/she praised the process for not allowing technology and non-technology capital outlay items to be leftovers in the budgeting process. Dr. Law explained the role of the

list in very concise terms, “If it’s not on the list it doesn’t exist. Sounds stupid until you do it once” (personal communication, March 3, 2009).

Dr. Law described the budget development process as being much more than just a list, but rather a way of requiring and demanding ownership of the budgeting process by all involved. Additionally, it allows for the leadership team to eliminate duplication, get some “easy” wins with low dollar needs, and align spending with strategies:

All the projects are listed and the way we do that online, they're all tied to some part of the goal so you already have that; then one of the things that happens is you find out there's a lot of overlap on projects. Two or three people on campus are doing the same thing so you can kind of consolidate. The real leadership trick on that is you find a lot of really little things for a little bit of money, things that you and I view as below rounding error that are like a treasure to faculty, ‘If I can get \$2,200 I can do something that does something for my classes’ and whatnot. Meanwhile you get a lot of good throughput. There's a ton of those people. The balance scale has been broken for a year. You want to see vice presidents scramble! But you want them fixed. You don't care who gets it.

The whole budget process...[let’s] you tell the board, everybody has a chance...everybody knows everybody else's, that sort of thing. Then you just do the usual honing in. How much can we afford? You can then look and say, we’ve got expenditures in each of the strategic spending categories. Because every proposal is tied to some part of the strategic plan when you sign up for it. Have you seen the website? It's a huge organizational benefit.... I've done this everywhere. Where there's a day when everybody must hear everybody else's budget stuff. That is the day, and you are expected to sit here and hear all of the budget presentations. If you are on the team you are responsible. As a member of the team you are responsible to support the budget decisions. Nobody gets a free ride to say, ‘It's their budget it's not mine.’ If you make a presentation you are committed to the end, and I expect you at the right moment to speak up for the budget. (personal communication, March 3, 2009)

President Law describes the inter-relationship with transparency, the strategic plan, and the budget and how essential that relationship is in leading an organization:

Once the planning and systems are in place you really plan at a much higher level. I think if I walked away tomorrow, I don't think they would go back from the transparency. I don't think they would go back from the value of the plan. The planning is what's kept us financially from feeling all the pressure. Planning for the cuts. Who you hire...there are a lot of presidents who have no interest in having a budget being transparent. I don't think that's a success in our day. That's really outmoded. I don't think today's organizations can do that. I think if you get stuck in that it's a strategy for losing. The data never blows up. People get nervous about it but it never does. It's so easy when you make the leap. That's the dialogue you'll hear here. When you make the jump to the other side, and you look back you'll say, why did we ever think that was a better notion? That's the thing that empowers me with the vice-presidents. Who would ever give this up -- planning systems and logic to the planning? (personal communication, March 3, 2009)

One interviewee explained his/her perception of the administration and their budgeting skills: “One thing I have to say about our administration, their budgeting skills and administrative skills are absolutely amazing to me” (Interviewee #10).

Theme 6: Data and Information Technology

Behind student success, “data” was the word referenced most often in the interviews. But more importantly, were the comments regarding change within the institution, and the impact that data has had on decision making. Discussions from interviewees were framed around and between “how far we have come” and “how far we need to go.” All agreed that the available information is a far cry from where the institution was in 2002; but more is wanted, additional analysis is needed, and enhancements to information technology systems are a necessity. To properly set the stage for the progress that has been made, a brief history of the information technology system is provided.

Information Technology – History. The information technology (IT) system is a consortium system (Integrow) that was developed in anticipation of Y2K. Tallahassee Community College (TCC) was a test school for the student information system. According to one of the interviewees, “The users don’t own the systems that they have today. There is still a lot of pain and a lot of scars for the people who have been here [through that conversion]” (Interviewee #11).

In the past, information was not trusted, systems were antiquated, the IT department was described as insular, and knowledge was held closely rather than shared. In contrast to today, where systems are trustworthy and reliable and communications and collaborations with and from the IT department are greatly improved:

No one trusted the data. The system was broke – no one trusted the system...there was no confidence in IT....The [IT] staff held the information very closely....there is a heroism type mentality among IT folks that make... when you are a hero, you tend to be very much relied upon all the time – you don’t share your knowledge across the organization. Many times you are the only one who has the answer – people have to call you, and you really enjoy that stimulation that you get from solving a problem...

...IT – it’s more of a functioning unit rather than several units that function outside of each other. That is the biggest thing. Along with that, we have gotten trustworthy data, reliable systems... From an organizational standpoint, I think we’ve gained much more into a collaborative environment, and I think the same thing is happening [in the organization] that happened in our department. People are starting to communicate with us [IT] – nothing is in a vacuum – all the information is shared. (Interviewee #11)

The changes and progress in IT were observed by many of the interviewees. Several were users of the data when it was maintained by IT, and they noted the difference now that access is available to them:

When I first started here – even for the first three years or so, if I wanted data, I would submit a data request and someone in IT would fill out a program to pull data out of our system. Now I can go in and I can pull some of the data I want. If the system doesn't have everything I need, I can put in a data request. (Interviewee #17)

Of the current IT projects described most often by the interviewees were the data warehouse projects and the portal system. The data warehouse project “converts Integrow data to a data warehouse environment....The data warehouse will allow end-users to have easy access to timely data as well as reports and software that will assist the user in their jobs at TCC” (TCC, 2008b, p. 1). The ultimate goal of the data warehouse is “to get the data out to the users’ hands and “get users to use more and more of the information” (Interviewee #11).

Similarly, the portal system consists of the following four portals designed for internal constituents: Board of Trustees, Presentations, Faculty and Staff, and Student and one Community Partners portal. All were created with the expectation to greatly “facilitate access to and use of information by respective stakeholders” (TCC, 2008a, p.8). These tools were driven by President Law “put[ting] a stake in the ground,,, [He wanted] portable technology to do our board meetings. In November 2006, we...started creating a portal for every monthly meeting” (Interviewee #11). In May 2007, a student portal was piloted and in the summer of 2007 the faculty/staff portal rolled out. While the internal portals have been scaled institution-wide, “we are not using 15% of the potential for this system” (Interviewee #11). The function of and the information available on each portal varies to meet the needs of its intended audience:

- The Board of Trustees Portal is used for each monthly board meeting. Each month a new portal site is created that contains the agenda, all related support materials for the agenda and a monthly workshop presentation....All Board members, administrators, staff, and faculty have access to this portal (TCC, 2008c, p. 10). One board member explains the benefits of the Board of Trustees portal in terms of easy access, leveraging technology, and improving efficiencies: “It put the data at the tip of a board member’s fingers to be able to go back and reference the information... [it] is accessible to you at all times without having to continually go back to staff with issues...leveraging technology to make immediate policy decisions and to also make us more efficient” (Interviewee #1). An employee interviewee commented on the increased engagement that he/she has observed with the Board, “...[they] are much more engaged and have much more information accessible to them so that they can ask more questions. You can see that they are thinking ahead—how does this connect to that – as opposed to before where we were just flashing things up on the PowerPoint screen” (Interviewee #27).
- The Presentations Portal houses presentations frequently made by TCC administration, faculty, and staff. No login is required for access to the portal (TCC, 2008c).
- The Faculty and Staff Portal houses all the committee sites, departmental sites, and other collaborations sites for faculty and staff. These include sites on budget initiatives, safety and security, and prioritization of projects. The site also provides access to email, the information systems, and a personal site via single sign on. All faculty and staff have access to this portal (TCC, 2008c). Administrators and staff interviewed referenced the portal many times – “it’s on the portal.” Some commented on their frustration in locating information on the portal and on its messiness, “The portal is a little bit of a mess right now. We’ve got to get in under control...The portal system has really become a storage

system more than the communication system it should be. We are not using all the power of it...It is getting very complicated. I think we are going to lose the impact if we don't fix it fast" (Interviewee #12). A similar perspective was communicated by faculty members, "Things are not easily found...If the portal were more user friendly, the communication would be great" (Interviewee #18).

- The Student Portal houses many resources for students. This includes an Individual Learning Plan, which all students are required to create for themselves. These resources range from email, on line course management, registration systems, and other campus resources. This is provided also through a single sign-on interface. A dashboard for each student is soon to be developed to give students data about their own performance and progress toward their educational goals (TCC, 2008c).

In addition to the data warehousing and portal projects, many new IT systems have been put in place over the past four years under the leadership of the new Vice President for Information Technology and with the support of President Law. Investments were made in hardware refresh, infrastructure, and professional development. Some old systems were scrapped during the process and all network operating systems were migrated to Microsoft. Currently, TCC is beginning deliberations about the need for a new enterprise resource planning system. Economics are one issue but defining the service needs and obtaining buy-in from the users are equally important to the organization (Interviewee #11).

While very supportive of the progress that has been made, limits on IT resources were discussed by several interviewees including President Law. Controlling the demands, prioritizing requests, and understanding the impact of those decisions are

critical for the both the users and leaders to understand. Such a realization helps to reduce internal disparities:

We've had to step back and see which chunks we can do, and what things do we have to stop fighting about because we just can't do all of it. There are a limited number of IT individuals and resources, and so we have tried to build in measures to move us forward but knowing that there is a much bigger piece we would like once we get the IT support to do it. (Interviewee #15)

President Law reiterated his trepidation about the scarcity of IT resources and stressed the importance of managing those resources at the top:

The use of the IT resources is in fact the scarcest resource at the institution and who is making the decision on the use of those resources. That ought to be at the highest level. And it still takes a huge discipline to say, 'These are at the front of the line....' You've got about 80% [of your resources] who are just maintaining...I think the CIO [Chief Information Officer] needs to be bring to the team, here are the requests. The controller would call the programmer and say, 'Here's what I need' so all the priorities were getting dispersed....If the vice-presidents need to re-manage the priorities, let them re-manage that but do not let the people two or three levels down set the priorities for the whole organization. (personal communication, March 3, 2009)

Data. Tallahassee Community College has invested in information technology. That investment and the commitment of leadership is an attempt to develop an organization that is data informed. This section will address specifics regarding the use of data in decision making.

According to President Law, one of the first data points that he wanted upon his arrival in 2002 was in enrollment management. He stated, "I was really disappointed that we had no system for enrollment management. This is incredibly low hanging fruit. Can we get a report every day as to who registered? ...I threatened to put up turnstiles because we'd have a closer count. It was just horrible" (personal communication,

January 27, 2009). President Law continued to push for accurate data, and “he started examining the numbers” (Interviewee #12). His commitment to data is based on the belief that it is the only way to support or challenge opinions:

The only way professionals change their opinions is when the data challenges what they believe to be true. It is not a function of good oratory or anything else. The data has to challenge what we believe to be true for us to cause a change. So the quicker we get to the data that either confirms or challenges, the better served we'll be. That's open ended. But it's out there. What you have to do is create the culture for that. Everybody ought to know what you're looking at. Early on before registration, I had to create a daily registration report....It changed if they know you're looking at it they'll look at it [too]. (personal communication, March 3, 2009)

One interviewee contrasted the gap between the actual data and past perceptions, “We were always operating under the assumption that we were number one, we had worked so hard to be there. We kind of thought we had arrived at this particular level then all of a sudden we started looking at data. The data did not verify what we thought we were. That was a real contrast” (Interviewee #13). Another interviewee explained the impact of sharing surprising data in very similar terms, “It is gathering all that data to show them [faculty] and doing it gently – to show them that they are not as successful as they think they are” (Interviewee #21).

A second interviewee contrasted the change with Dr. Law to data informed decision making:

When Dr. Law came in, we began the journey of focusing on data and making decisions based on that data. That candidly had not been done. Before Bill Law came to Tallahassee Community College, I had never been asked what my FTE [student full-time equivalent] was...I would describe what I needed and that was the way it was. It was a major transformation, a major shift on the way we did business. (Interviewee #28)

Three sources of data were referenced by the interviewees as ones that had the greatest initial impact on the institution under President Law's leadership. Two of the sources were validated outside of the institution which contributed to their believability. The first was the data from the Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE). Tallahassee Community College participated in CCSSE for the first time in February 2003. President Law reflects on the significance of that first survey and CCSSE in general:

The first time I saw the testing and the care that goes into the management of that [CCSSE]...I thought it was wonderful. Effective data lends itself to strategy interpretation. You don't need much interpretation – you don't need to be a statistician – there is not footnote at the bottom. It is clearly pulled out – it's not a popularity contest – it's just data, and it's a pretty short haul for faculty to respect that data. On the faculty side, the CCSSE piece was really good. (personal communication, January 27, 2009)

The results of that first survey showed that the College had a number of areas of success but also several areas of challenges. This feedback helped to shape the quality enhancement plan initiatives focused on improving collaboration and critical thinking. Several faculty members referenced the impact of CCSSE data, and one attributes it as a key motivation for the curriculum design in developmental education, "...The reason we are doing the redesign was the data from the CCSSE reports...CCSSE actually helped us look at the data honestly" (Interviewee #18). Another interviewee from the student affairs areas also responded positively about the first CCSSE experience, "CCSSE -- what are our students telling us about their experience? Has anyone ever asked? I

thought that was such a novel idea when we start talking about CCSSE” (Interviewee #22).

The second source of data that made an impact was the comparison of State Accountability data, which provided “comparisons and benchmarks for retention, job placement, and success of transfer students” (TCC, n.d.b, p.6). One interviewee explained that when he/she saw the data, he/she asked the faculty “where the weak link” was in the sequence of courses. Once that was identified, the faculty “embarked upon a three-year project to redesign that course...put critical thinking back into the course as opposed to a skill based course. It has made a difference – we are seeing that – we are now in our third year and we are starting to see the fruits of that, in the later courses” (Interviewee #8). He/she continued, “The main difference that Dr. Law changed was, ‘how do you know [that] you have a good program? Show me the numbers.’ That was quite new to us” (Interviewee #8).

The third initial data source that made an impact was the first time in college (FTIC) cohort tracking that began with fall 2003. According to President Law, the cohort tracking was important not only for employees but for the Board of Trustees also; “It helped to change the dialogue” (personal communication, March 3, 2009) and the benefits are multifold:

It's easily defined. It's a small number. [It's] easy to identify. They [the students] come untainted. There are no asterisks next to everybody. It proved to be a better tool to get the dialogue to the right place. I'd sit the executive[s] down and say, 'How many new college students do we have that are new to us only,' and they won't even venture a guess because it's too hard to guess. We didn't even know that piece. We didn't even know who was here. And then secondly...this should put an end to us talking about two year programs. Let's change the dialogue. Nobody gets through in two years. How can they, they need a year of remediation. Some of those were just ways for people to get in dialogues. That one ended up being a way to not have to take on all the data issues at once. Everybody can understand who they are. It's a small enough number so the finding will lend credibility. I think they [the cohort] lend themselves to strategies pretty quickly. (personal communication, March 3, 2009)

One of early issues was clarifying logistics regarding the cohort. For example, timing of the pull was designated to occur on the evening of the first day of classes. Additionally, Dr. Law clarified that the cohort must “always account for everybody” (personal communication, January 27, 2009) even if they are no longer attending college, (i.e. the starting number does not get reduced when students quit attending).

The initial cohort experience was described as eye opening, a baseline, and an opportunity to understand the student:

The other thing we did, which is quite eye opening, we choose a cohort of first time college students and have looked at their progress over several years. I think it is eye opening to most of our faculty as to how many students do graduate in two years, three years, or four years. I think most faculty, and I'm the same way, they think, oh – sure – everyone graduates. Well, those numbers are no way everyone. (Interviewee #8)

My understanding... the purpose of that cohort was just let's see. We are going to follow it out until almost every student in that 2003 cohort is not here. Up until recently, we did present to the board every semester. Let's just see what happened to that cohort before there were interventions, before we started trying new programs. (Interviewee #15)

The cohort studies allow us the opportunity to study student behavior, student performance, and adjust the policies accordingly. (Interviewee #14)

One board member describes the impact of that first cohort and the Achieving the Dream initiative on the monthly board activities and the need to understand the information:

We had some pretty tough issues as we began to look into Achieving the Dream. The issues that I thought were very important in terms of our first cohort of students, first time in college students, what was happening to those students, and what kinds of programs we needed to have in place to support them...we needed to have more information. (Interviewee #1)

This desire for more information and a greater understanding of that information resulted in the Board of Trustees agreeing to monthly workshops prior to each board meeting. The purpose each month was to discuss a single strategic issue in great depth.

The workshops are described as an educational opportunity:

What I found and what I see now, is that our Board [while it] is not that we weren't learned before, but we are much more conversant about the issues. We have a lot more data in front of us...[these workshops are] an education opportunity for us as a Board.... (Interviewee #1)

The FTIC 2003 cohort included 1,712 students and was tracked for five years. The last workshop presentations on the FTIC 2003 cohort were conducted in September 2008 and January 2009. See details in the quantitative analysis in Section 6 of this chapter.

The discussions on how data is currently being utilized at the institution came from many perspectives. In essence, the interviewees, including board members,

discussed the attributes of a culture of evidence as they described how data is impacting decisions and driving changes:

It is a whole picture – we look at numbers – we see where our enrollment is – we look to see what is the composite of the enrollment of the racial background of our students, so we can compare it to the racial demographics [of the community] to make sure we are reaching out to the right populations. We look at the delivery of the programs, and try to direct ourselves to a place [where] we think we are getting the best utilization of our resources of people, personnel, and the equipment. (Interviewee #2)

We are the voice and the face that interlinks the community and the academic environment, and the use of data is what provides us with valid, concrete infallible information to help make decisions and help drive direction for the college. (Interviewee #3)

It's using that kind of data to help drive the curriculum change. (Interviewee #21)

I think it keeps people's eye on the prize. It keeps people focused on what they are trying to achieve. It provides some coherence also.....From a motivational standpoint, if you are working on a project – say you are the coordinator – the data allows you to get feedback on your program processes and how well your program is working. I just can't imagine being in a situation where you don't have that information – informed decision-making. I think you can also provide a motivational element in that respect. (Interviewee #18)

While these perspectives were positive, there were several that were concerned about the volume of data, how to capture data without being intrusive, and how to use data without it becoming overwhelming:

It sort of - finding a balance of getting as much useful data as you can, but not making it a barrier. You don't want the student not to come here because they have to go through the rig-a-ma-roll thing. We try to make it easy. The next phase is the report phase. We are pretty well into that, defining the kind of standard reports that we want to be able to get from the data. The next phase is the 'does it make a difference' phase, where we actually connect the student's use and the activities that they do here, and the completion of those activities to their success in the class, their retention and alternately, graduation. We've been very good at

counting in the past....That kind of information is useful for staffing and budgeting, but it doesn't tell me if we are doing a good job. (Interviewee #9)

I think we have a lot of data, and we have little understanding of the data. I think we're going to have the greatest impact on the college once we understand the data that we're looking at. (Interviewee #20)

We are just now beginning to see where the pieces fit together. (Interviewee #15)

We have an awful lot of descriptive data. We are still pushing for more predictive data. (Interviewee #12)

Some of these concerns may be due to the enormous amounts of information that are being pushed out and available to the users, especially through the data warehouse. Training is an integral part of the roll-outs, and the users have access to many options of compiling and assimilating the data. This requires the user to understand and question the data and related reports that are generated with a greater level of expertise. Those interviewed acknowledged complexity and underdevelopment:

I can't examine as many variables as I would like to examine. (Interviewee #13)

The data is always wrong and you have to sort it out and re-fix it. We still aren't to the point with our data warehouse system where we can do longitudinal studies....That is very complicated stuff. (Interviewee #12)

The great thing is that people like me can query that database. That is so much more efficient than submitting some form to get data, and then figure out after you've submitted the form and looked at the report that is not quite what you want. If you can do it yourself, then in five minutes, you can redo the query. So, we still – it's not perfect yet – it's not a 100% but we have all academic history there. We have all grades back to 2000 or 1998 or something like that. We can do a lot of queries. One thing that we are still working on that I don't know how to do is to follow students from one course to another. I can do it, but I don't quite know how to get the data warehouse to do that. That is supposed to be coming in the next month or so. (Interviewee #8)

We've got a data warehouse, which is just partially underdeveloped. Our IT people say it will never be done because we are going to always be adding elements and fields....Survey data is not in the warehouse. It will be eventually. (Interviewee #17)

Establishing a culture of evidence has impacted Tallahassee Community College.

Users have access to more data, and the IT systems are more reliable, but technology is a challenge. Dr. Christine McPhail, Achieving the Dream coach for TCC, explains the concern: "I think that [IT] is going to be the greatest challenge for them [TCC] in terms of the expediency that they retrieve their data, the use of data to monitor the things they have in place, and getting them the kind of data they need. That is going to be their biggest challenge" (person communication, March 19, 2009).

Theme 7: People and Development

Of the 23 employees interviewed, 11 had been at Tallahassee Community College (TCC) prior to the arrival of President Law. Several interviewees commented on the number of new employees in the organization. One interviewee estimated the faculty hires since Dr. Law's arrival, "We've had quite a change – I imagine I've hired 40% ...probably about 45-50% have been hired since Bill Law came here" (Interviewee #8).

Several interviewees mentioned the hiring processes including national searches and recruitment brochures for faculty positions, Dr. Law's commitment to interview all faculty members, and his philosophies on attracting the best and encouraging diversity. The philosophy to attract the best is multipart, "If you are good, you are going to beat all the competition...Part of it is attracting people nationally and having a process internally that gets the best candidates to the top" (Interviewee #12).

Enhancing the diversity and culturally responsiveness of TCC was addressed in the quality enhancement plan and through Achieving the Dream. One interviewee acknowledged the progress that has been made in hiring minority faculty members, “We do need to have more minority faculty on our campus, and there has been a concerted effort over the past few years to do that. Since ATD has started, we have increased our minority faculty by 41%” (Interviewee #27). Several interviewees commented on Dr. Law’s commitment to diversity and how the in recruit and interview processes have changed:

Each year the president meets with the faculty at the fall welcome, and discusses the diversity question so there is no misunderstanding about that. He talks about his commitment. How we are going to find candidates? How we are going to reach out? And how we are going to bring candidates who we believe have potential and have the TCC magic? We weren’t hiring anyone right out of graduate school. We were hiring people [that had been] adjuncts for years. You don’t hire minorities when you do that. They don’t stay in the pool that long. They were not measuring up to all of the inside knowledge of the college. That was one of the things we changed. Every year, he has that conversation with the faculty. He makes it very clear that there is no quota – there is never a time when he has said this kind of persons needs to be hired in that position. He just wants a strong pool. (Interviewee #12)

Another interviewee referenced the hiring process and its successes in being designed to be selective and to capture the best candidates: “We are very selective about our hiring perspective. We have struck gold with faculty that we have hired. They are all student oriented” (Interviewee #16).

Being able to trust the people on your team and having the right people on the team were mentioned in very clear terms by Dr. Law and another senior administrator. Additionally, both recognized the need to make changes if wrong hiring decisions are

made: “I had a couple that I hired and haven’t kept. I am adamant that I have absolutely trustworthy and the best people in these positions...When it didn’t happen, I didn’t renew their contracts. That is critical” (Interviewee #12).

To this same regard, President Law reflects on some of the personnel issues that he first encountered at TCC:

Part of our problem was everybody was too insular here. They had this institution but it only talked to itself. Good people limited by their insularity. Then we lost some good people. We've been through a couple of good experiences, a couple of bad experiences at the executive level...It took several years to break down the old system, the habits. (personal communication. March 3, 2009)

He also discussed the necessity for developing a leadership team. It requires a commitment to team building exercises and a clear understanding of the order of commitments:

We put a lot of energy into team building. We hired a consultant. We did the whole thing. We all did several indicator types and personality tests. Then the absolute thing was...here's the most important thing...‘Your highest commitment is to the success of the leadership team. Even though you're the chief academic officer, your highest commitment is to the success of the executive team, closely followed by your commitment to your team but don't get them in the wrong order. Toward the end we would identify, ‘What do we want to do in the next 90 days that makes this team effective?’ (personal communication, March 3, 2009)

This order is important to the trust between individual team members and to how the team trusts as a whole. Dr. Law indicated that members that cannot understand this order should not be on the team, and ultimately, may need to leave the organization.

In contrast to this, is the focus on professional development for new faculty hires. Several faculty members mentioned the three-year orientation program. Some

referenced it as “indoctrination;” mostly with positive connotations. The reasons behind the program were varied but focused largely on culture, teaching and learning, and collaboration. Two interviewees elaborate:

The reason for the faculty seminars was not the issue with retention, but we really wanted to strengthen the culture and bring us together.....The focus on the first year is on the classroom, on the instruction part...In year two, we focus on collegial relationships.. (Interviewee #10)

When we hired faculty, one of the things he [President Law] wanted to do was create a cohort of all the faculty from the different disciplines. He almost presented it as a social thing. They need to get to know the institution. They need people to talk with what is going on or whatever. We made it a slightly more formal process, and it is a three-year support program for new faculty. (Interviewee #12)

Faculty who are in the midst of the program spoke very highly of it. One put the purpose in very simple terms:

What it really does, is that it teaches the teachers what the students need to learn. As opposed to letting people fly by the seat of their pants or approach students without any understanding of the philosophy behind TCC. And how much we care about what happens to the students as opposed to letting teachers teach what they want to teach. (Interviewee #25)

The commitment to recruiting, hiring, and developing faculty was noticeable from the comments. Fewer comments were received regarding staff replacements since many have been put on hold or are filled with part-time personnel as a result of the budget shortfalls. Some comments were received regarding concerns of how the budget cuts could begin to impact service levels.

Theme 8: Sustainability of the Shared Vision

As mentioned in the various themes throughout this section, President Law is described as a visionary, and many interviewees referenced “his vision” or “the vision” for student success. In conducting and reviewing the interviewees, it was apparent to the researcher that the President had a significant impact on this focus. Many times it was referred to as the President’s vision, the President’s matrix, and the President’s quotes. Several interviewees referenced the past when the student success focus was not institutionalized:

We had begun to do that [student success agenda], but again, it was not from the president’s level. We did a big study on retention, and we realized some areas where we needed to do some work. But...it was really not in the vision of this institution. It was in the background. (Interviewee #12)

There is no doubt that this institution has made huge strides since 2002. Dr. Law’s vision is very important to moving that forward (Interviewee # 9)

These comments lead one to question if the interviewees believed in the student success vision or if it was truly just President Law’s vision.

In light of these comments, one of the questions that the researcher was concerned about was the sustainability of the student success vision and specifically, would it continue if President Law left the institution --- had the focus been institutionalized and penetrated through the organization past the executive leadership team? The researcher asked this question of each interviewee. The responses were thoughtful, reflective, and unanimous that the institution had been transformed, and that the focus on student success and the use of data informed decision making would

remain. None provided a rushed response, but rather each appeared to contemplate where the institution had been and what was envisioned for the future. The employees interviewed conditioned their responses with the caveat that a new president could change that focus, but they were committed to the agenda. In contrast, the board members were adamant that there was no going back.

The impact of this theme on the future of the institution is so significant that nearly all of the interviewee responses are included in this section. The responses are grouped first by employees and then by board members. From the employee perspective, Dr. Law's leadership on this agenda was recognized, but there was also an agreement on progress, structural changes, and the need to continue on the student success journey:

I think so. The only thing of caution when I say that is it depends on the agenda of the next president. Some presidents like to build buildings. (Interviewee # 17)

Clearly things would be implemented differently – that is just the nature of leadership. But I think the institution has gotten it in terms of the usefulness of data. (Interviewee #28)

I think it would continue, and it would depend on who would replace him how long it would continue...He laid the foundation and everyone is building on it. I would like to believe that if he chooses to leave tomorrow, that the work that has been started would continue on. It might look different – it might have a different definition. He has been able to bring forth the definition of student success at the basic core – students finish what they start. We can't get much easier. Somebody else might come in and want to frame it differently, but I think he has allowed a context that they [all employees] figure out they play a role.... The thing that is different is that he has put the resources behind building the infrastructure. Depending on the leader behind him, and where their priorities were, that could be different. In today's world, I would find it very likely to be able to find a president that is still committed to technology, resources, and data to make good

decisions. It could happen but I think we would still be moving in the same direction. (Interviewee #15)

I think so because you can talk to people who are not working directly with students who see their role...I hope that we have made enough progress that it has become part of the culture. Although, he is a real strong leader. I can't imagine, if he left, the college would say we were not going to propose [these student success] initiatives. Leadership is very important. (Interviewee #17)

He [President Law] has institutionalized student success. Absolutely. He continues to pull us along also. He has institutionalized student success. We have enough data and structures in place that that would continue to be a part of our discussion and our means for making decisions....I'm not saying that if the whole VP [vice president] body left also – I think it would be harder to sustain without that focus and leadership....He didn't just move us over here and go off and do something else. He continued to lead us further....You don't just get to one part and you stop. You keep on going because times are a changing. (Interviewee #8)

He won't leave any time soon! We will retain the practices. He likes the learning college. He has made a mark. The structural changes that have occurred have benefitted the students. We have retained the practices that you see at many small schools – the caring and focus on students --- even through growth. (Interviewee #16)

The three Board of Trustees interviewed believe that the focus on student success has been institutionalized and while a new president may attempt to change that agenda, the leadership team and employees are committed to it also. But even more importantly, the board members understand the student success agenda and would recruit to hire someone that is committed to it, as they are:

I think it would continue, and it would depend on who would replace him how long it would continue. There are extremely awesome, motivated people on staff at this community college. They live and breathe us – they really try to make a difference...This is not magic – it is just a lot of work. It doesn't happen by wishing and dreaming. You have to have people who are motivated and supportive... (Interviewee #2)

My answer...is that they have a Board that believes in a student finishing what they start. As long as you have members of the Board that will be intact, that will be helpful. Let's say that Dr. Law leaves and the governor appoints a brand new board. I firmly believe that ... it has definitely been drilled into everyone – everyone firmly believes in student success. That is a core measure in terms of how we define ourselves at TCC. (Interviewee #1)

The thing I like most about the direction on student success and certainly data is that it has a complete directional authority buy in and support of the trustees. Whoever is in the president's slot will know that the trustees expect that to continue.... Dr. Law has 100% buy-in with his leadership. If I look around at the VPs [vice presidents], every single one of them shares his exact same passion for this...If the VP [vice president] for ... leaves, that support system is there, and I think it will continue. If the President leaves, I think that support system is there, and we'd be fine. Also, I think that community and all of our alumni have seen the benefit of this. The new president coming in, as part of the screening process, we're going to find a person who supports this.... Now can we find someone with the passion and dedication and true vision that he has? Who knows? Some day we will be faced with that. (Interviewee #3)

An external perceptive was received from McPhail based on her observations and work with Tallahassee Community College as their Achieving the Dream coach. She comments first on the changes that she has observed and then on the sustainability of those changes:

I will start with the piece that is at the core of ATD [Achieving the Dream] initiatives, and that is the use of data to inform the decisions that they make and to monitor their students' performance as they matriculate through the institution. That has changed drastically. ..The college has identified measurable ways that they plan to define student success. They use data to monitor the academic performance of students. They are looking at ways to scale up their early alert system. They have used data to re-engineer some of the upfront student support services. They use data to help drive the institution's plan, and they also add to the use of data, the education that goes along with how to use it in order to make decisions. They have web sites for their board where they periodically report on the success initiatives that they have on campus.... I think what I see most glaringly are the key decision makers, support staff, and administrative staff rallying around a single agenda for one – that is student success. You have them also saying how does this particular department facilitate student success? How

does this particular program or activity that we are engaged in support student success? I think that is a huge transformation....

[On sustainability of the student success vision,] I know with a degree of confidence that the Board of Trustees knows what is going on. I believe that they support it. They are educated. That is one factor that I believe is very important. The other piece is that they have core faculty at Tallahassee that is really interested in making significant changes in the way that they teach. They have realigned curriculum in some of those really technical courses. They have re-engineered student support services. They are reconnecting with each other internally to focus on students who are successful and those who are not. (personal communication, March 19, 2009)

The interviewees were clear not only on President Law's commitment to student success, but also on the Board of Trustees and the employees. It appears that the focus has cascaded through the institution beginning at the highest levels. While possible, it was considered remote that the focus on student success could be derailed. Such a noteworthy alteration in the vision of the institution would require a change in the president but also a significant change in composition of the Board of Trustees.

Section 5 – Student Portal and Individual Learning Plans

This treatise includes an embedded case study with the unit of analysis as the student learning portal. The purpose of this embedded case study was directed at understanding how students are using this tool and its related impact. The student portal, known as TCC Passport, was launched in the October 2007, and is an advancement of the online advising tool Eaglenet, first launched in 2002-2003. TCC Passport is part of a comprehensive effort at Tallahassee Community College (TCC):

to ensure – or rather to require – that every student create an electronic portal containing an individualized learning plan...Our belief is that the best means for us to serve students individually and for students to get the best support for their unique needs is to establish a single repository for information, communication, and student self-determination. (Law, 2008, p. 234)

The tool “simplifies student access to critical college resources by offering a single sign-on for access to student email, Blackboard, and critical advising and registration modules (including learning plan components)” (TCC, 2008g, p. 12). The individual learning plans are found under “My Success,” and they include numerous components including advising pages, steps for success, checklists, graduation status, planning guide and the development of a complete educational plan. A new “My Career Plan” component is being developed which will illustrate “the intersection of academic and career planning” (TCC, 2008g, p. 12). TCC Passport also enables the College to collect data on students and send out targeted messages.

In the fall 2006, TCC required students to have learning plans on file prior to registering for the spring 2007 semester. Approximately 6,500 students or nearly 50% of the total enrollment participated in the initial requirement. FTIC 2008 was comprised of 2,415 students, and 2,245 or 93% attended orientation and completed the first components of the individual learning plans (TCC, 2008g). Additionally, student usage of TCC Passport is reported at an average of 21,465 hits per day during a 30-day reporting period in January and February 2009. For this same 30-day period, 10,374 distinct users were accessed the tool (TCC, 2009d).

The student portal and learning plans are viewed as an important student engagement tool but also as a means for learning about the students' actual behaviors through data analysis. While some of the analysis components are still underdevelopment, future opportunities are numerous. Law (2008) describes examples of uses such as monitoring unsuccessful performance patterns against multi-semester plans for trends such as excessive course loads or discontinuity in math courses. Another example would be analyzing "course dropout patterns that presage eventual college drop-out [that] can be anticipated and modified" (Law, 2008, p. 237). TCC foresees that the tools associated with the student portal and learning plans can be used to predict and intercede proactively to student behaviors rather than reactively (Law, 2008).

In order to understand how students are using the tools and how those tools are contributing to the student's success, three students were interviewed. The students commented on TCC Passport but drew a strong connection between it and academic planning and advising and orientation. Additionally, comments from faculty interviewees provided a greater understanding of the impact of the student learning portal on the advising process.

The student interviewees indicated that they use TCC Passport, the academic planner is a feature used most often, and they like the system integration not only within TCC itself but also with universities:

I use the TCC Passport more than anything. I like the idea where they tried to bring all that information together...They have a lot of accessories like an academic planner. I've used that with my advisor, but it is so rare. I plan these things myself. There are utilities available for students if they need them, but I do

that on my own...I need four chemistry classes so I put those into my academic planner. However, as far as extending [transferring] into a school like FSU (Florida State University), you have options in the academic planner where you can say that you would like to go to this university and major in this. The academic planner works with the registration holds, that is if this is your chosen major and you do not have these prerequisites fulfilled, then it will notify you of that through email...The academic planner gives you a drop down of semester, and it gives you 5-7 available classes that you can put your choices under...It is really important and I use it a couple of times you a semester...I think it is very useful. I would suggest that other students used it. (Interviewee #6)

Basically, it [TCC Passport] is a way for the teacher's to get things to the students. I use it every day. It's got my email,...blackboard, [and] it has your degree audit. You can see what classes you are missing. I can get a plan for the next semester or two. (Interviewee #4)

Is that [TCC Passport] where you go in to get your schedule and stuff?...I use it when I'm getting ready to register for classes..., [for] my GPA, and [to] see my status as to how close I am to graduating. Showing me my progress is the most beneficial part to me. It shows me where I am, and what I'm doing so far. (Interviewee #5)

The students linked their use of TCC Passport with the role of advising. All three discussed the role and importance of advising in determining the appropriate courses, considering load, and just having someone available for questions:

You have someone to bounce ideas off of. Someone to help you figure out what you like to do or what would work best. (Interviewee #6)

He [the advisor] will run it past me [and ask] what I want to do. He will go over it with me. He will tell me that these are the classes so that it's not like all science classes one semester, all history classes the next. He balanced it really well, I think. I was kind of confused how I should go about doing [my schedule]. In high school, they pretty much gave you your schedule. (Interviewee #4)

I'm used to having a guidance counselor in high school so when I came here, you have someone to advise you and tell you what classes to take. It helps to see what classes you need. (Interviewee #5)

Orientation is mandatory for all FTIC students at TCC, and during the session an introduction to TCC Passport is provided. Two of the interviewees felt that much of the information presented in the orientation was redundant for them or “stuff that I could have done at home” (Interviewee #5), but all three did admit to gaining some helpful information. One student felt the financial aid information was especially important:

I knew a lot of the information, but I think it was very informative...What was especially important was the financial aid. A lot of people come here – they want to go to school, but they don’t know how to do things – they don’t know how to pay. Financial aid was when people started waking up from their chair and started to listen. (Interviewee #6)

Another student felt that orientation was almost overwhelming because of the volume of information:

They pretty much went over everything, really...They introduce it all to us and then they give us a chance. They said that these are the things you can use, and then once you got it and used it, it all made sense. At first it can be overwhelming. You think this is a lot of information, but once you actually start to use it, it really isn’t so much....If I had not had that [orientation] I probably wouldn’t have used them [student portal tools]. I probably wouldn’t even know about them. (Interviewee #4)

The third student interviewee felt the review of the catalog was the most helpful, “The most useful thing was someone taking you through the catalog and actually being able to see what this class was for” (Interviewee #5).

During the discussions, the interviewees provided a couple of recommendations for enhancements or changes to TCC Passport. The first was about condensing the information on the portal to make it less confusing:

What I would like to see with TCC Passport is more condensed information....Sometimes I get confused because...it is almost to the point where it is redundant. I see that each of them [the tools] has their own significance, but sometimes I feel that it is too much. I only need a couple of tools to work with...I've heard one person that made a statement that she felt it was way too much. That they are over-doing it. They are over-thinking it. It needs to be more simple. (Interviewee #6)

The other two students suggested that more feedback is needed from faculty and that TCC Passport could be that vehicle. One interviewee responded in general about feedback, "At college, you don't get as much feedback. You just get a grade ...you do get the papers back...The feedback helps me know why I got the grade I did get" (Interviewee 5). The second respondent suggested that grades on tests be posted on TCC Passport, "I would make it mandatory to have the teachers post the grades there...you can assess where you are in class. Not all teachers do that, and you are wondering" (Interviewee #4).

The final conversation with the student interviewees was about student success. The question asked was, "Do you feel that people here at the college are really interested in you being successful?" All three responded positively and referenced faculty who care and support services provided at TCC. This interviewee described the holistic approach that she/he has experienced:

They [the students] really love the support here because they [TCC employees] want you to succeed. It is all over the school....'You're success is our priority' is everywhere. They try to give you every single tool. That's what I think TCC Passport is trying to do, but for me I would like it if it were more simple...My professors are wonderful people. They have office hours mandatorily...They also have email accounts so you can email them at any time...I had one professor who gave me her cell number. Yes, they want you to do your best. The Learning Commons is the cherry on top that really makes the statement. (Interviewee #6)

The newly opened Learning Commons is “a comprehensive, integrated learning center that provides learning assistance and resources to TCC students at every level of academic study” (TCC, n.d.j, p.7). One floor of the building is dedicated to math, business, health sciences, physical sciences, and natural sciences. The second floor supports reading, writing, language skills, and assistance to non-native speakers of English. Students have access to computers, computer applications, technical support, library staff, and student success specialists (TCC, n.d.j).

At TCC, faculty members have an advising role. The number of students advised by each varies. The number of advisees per faculty member varies, but generally, it is around 30. Several of the faculty members indicated that many of their advisees are reluctant to use the portal, and many times the advisor has to assist the student with basic set-up. Overall, the respondents were supportive of the portal and the amount of information that is available, but there was a bit of confusion regarding which system to use (Eaglenet versus TCC Passport). One faculty believes that even though students are reluctant to use the tools, the combined offerings of the portal, orientation, and faculty advising are a means to success:

The student portal is for their success; blackboard is separate, it is for their classes...They [the students] don't want to type in the information [for the learning plans]...We [the advisors] really have to go back over those points in advising. Some of them get it and some don't...The orientation piece has really taken off – it is being fine-tuned. The advising piece with the faculty – I love it – I wish it had been in place when I was going to college. I would have finished on time. That piece has really been a blessing – I really love it. (Interviewee #18)

Several advisors commented on their own hesitation and confusion in using the new portal instead of the prior Eaglenet system. But all admitted once they got in the new system, it provided useful, helpful, and easily accessible information. One interviewee acknowledged, “there is a lot on the portal that I find helpful. There are the transfers...their [other colleges'] pre-requisites...[and] there are tips posted by each division” (Interviewee #25). Another interviewee concluded that TCC Passport “is a great plan for the students to have some accountability and know where they are going” (Interviewee #23). A third interviewee compared TCC Passport to the system he/she used at a state university:

I was so impressed with the infrastructure and the availability of the information for us at TCC -- for the students and the faculty members. They give us the tools to keep us informed and to make us be the best we can. I look at a huge university and think they should copy TCC's system. (Interviewee #24)

The discussions around TCC Passport and the learning portal indicate that these tools are being used, but possibly with a certain level of reluctance, by students. Both the faculties and the students agreed that the available information is voluminous which sometimes leads to confusion. This may be attributable to the newness of system changes. Additionally, comments from both segments of interviewees indicated that the portal is just one of several tools that are available to students in helping them develop

their educational goals. Law (2008) describes the relationship at TCC, “We have chosen to give each student the tools to determine how best to call on our many resources, while at the same time making certain that *every* student is aware and consistently nurtured in calling on those resources” (p. 239).

Section 6 - Secondary Quantitative Data Methodology

While the primary methodology for this study is a qualitative approach, a review of quantitative data was performed as a secondary methodology. Tallahassee Community College (TCC) provided a variety of quantitative data that could be reviewed. The researcher elected to review data presented to the Board of Trustees during their September 2008 and January 2009 workshops.

Data Presented at September 2008 Board Workshop

During the September 2008 workshop (TCC, 2008e), the focus was on the 2003 first time in college (FTIC) cohort. This cohort is considered the baseline for the institution; it represents what happened to students without a concerted effort on interventions.

The first report, entitled *What Happened to the 2003 FTIC Cohort?*, is included as Figure 1. It tracks where the 1,712 students in the cohort have landed after five years, through summer session 2008.

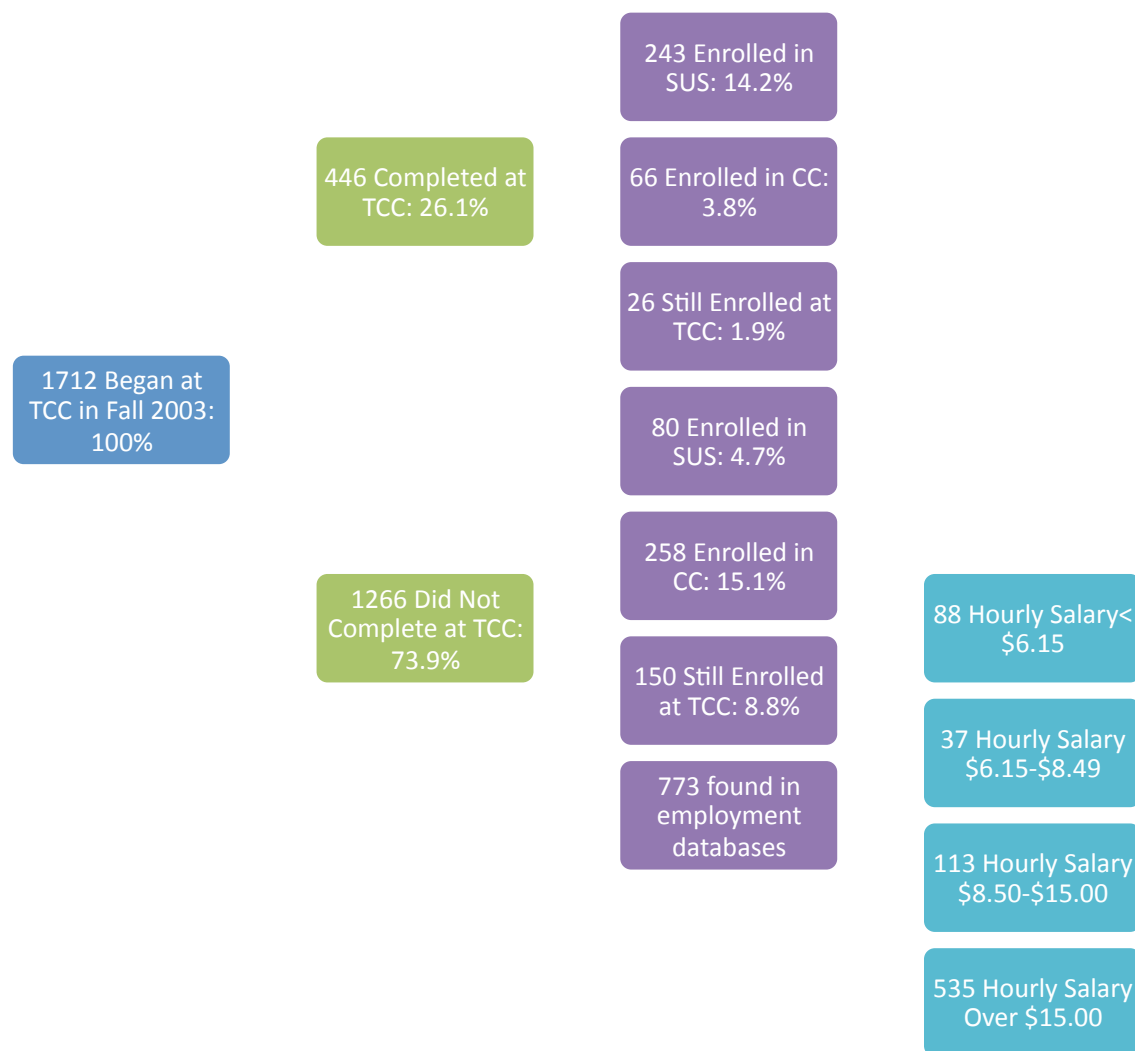


Figure 1. What Happened to the Fall 2003 FTIC Cohort?

Note: Tallahassee Community College [TCC]. (2008e). *September 2008 FTIC data board workshop: FTIC cohort analysis follow-up*. Retrieved November 26, 2008, from https://presentations.tcc.fl.edu/bot/sep08/FTIC_cohort_follow-up.aspx

The first split (green boxes) is based on information maintained through TCC's information technology systems, and it reflects the 466 students that completed at Tallahassee Community College compared to the 1,266 student who did not complete.

For this analysis, completed was defined as completing a certificate program or graduating with a degree.

The information reported in the next two levels of division (purple and aqua boxes) was obtained in conjunction with a pilot program which partners and aligns data management resources with the State of Florida. Through this partnership, the information in the purple boxes was provided by the State through its education data warehouse which tracks whether the individual students are enrolled in another State University System (SUS) or community college (CC). The information in the aqua boxes was provided by the State of Florida through its Florida Education and Training Information Program which shows 773 of the 1,266 who did not complete at TCC were tracked to current employment databases and at what pay level they are employed. Additionally, there are 26 of the completers and 150 of the non-completers that are still enrolled at TCC. Ninety-three percent of the original 1,712 students are accounted for in the aqua boxes; resulting in 116 unaccounted students. This means that the students could not be tracked through the various databases maintained by the State of Florida.

While the future of this State partnership is not clear, one of the reasons that TCC is working on obtaining this information is to gain a clearer understanding of the various goals that students have for taking classes. An interviewee working on this partnership explained its significance:

It's based on self-supported goals, as well as if they were to continue on with another institution or if their goal was to enhance their marketable skills. They come to TCC and take a class or two, and then they leave. If they left and gained a well paying position, they would have accomplished their goal....That starts to

cause a paradigm shift in how do you determine or grade a school on its performance, especially as it relates to those students who dropped out. It ties it more directly to the students' self-identified objective rather than whether they completed a degree or certificate program. (Interviewee #14)

The second set of information presented at the September 2008 Board Workshop (TCC, 2008f) was also based on the 1,712 students of the FTIC 2003 cohort. For this report, the 2003 cohort was tracked through January 2008, and the participants were assigned to four categories: graduated, dropped out, enrolled and not enrolled. The categories of graduated and enrolled are self-explanatory, but 'not enrolled' is defined as currently not attending. An individual moves from the 'not enrolled' category to the 'dropped out' category once he/she is not enrolled for more than two long semesters. Within each category, total terms enrolled, successful completion, courses withdrawn, grade point average comparison, and college prep required were monitored.

An example of the reports is provided in Figure 2, which recounts the successful completion within each category. For example, of the 399 students who had graduated, 150 or 37.6% successfully completed all courses 90% or more of the time. Only one of the graduated students had a 50% or lower completion rate.

In contrast, of the 1,003 students who are classified as dropped out, 561 or 55.9% of this group had a successful completion rate less than 50% of the time. And of the not enrolled students, 48.1% had a successful completion rate less than 50% of the time.

Successful Completion

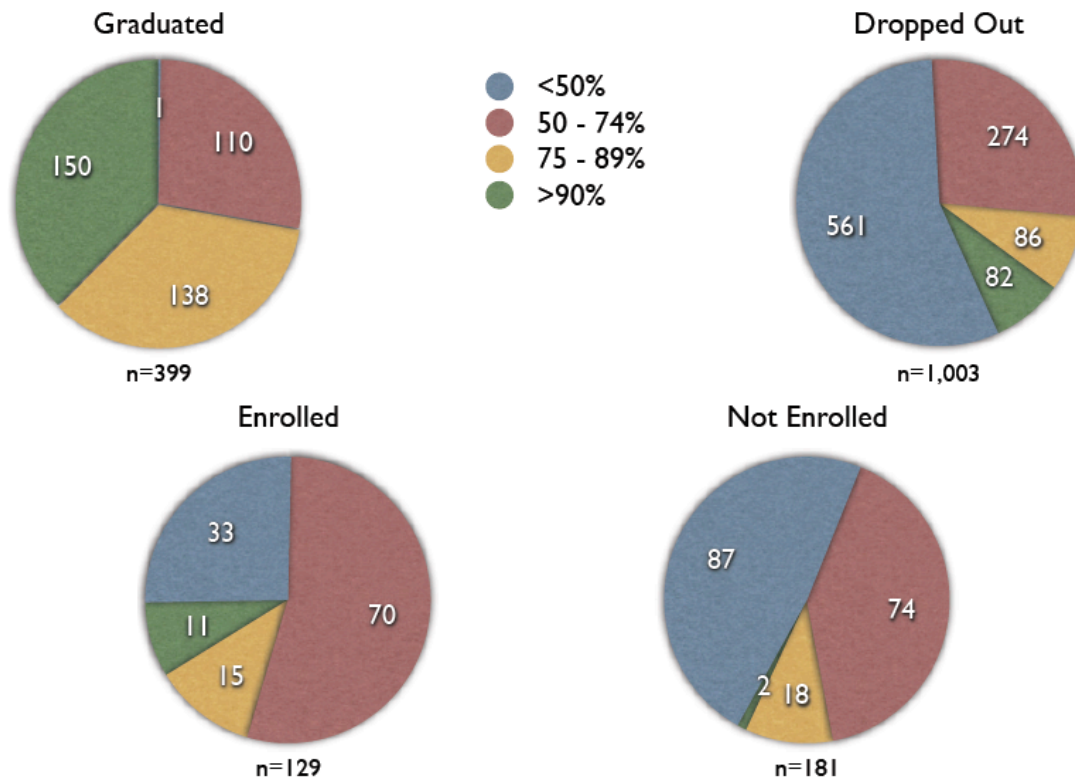


Figure 2. Successful Completion of 2003 FTIC cohort

Note: Tallahassee Community College [TCC]. (2008f). *September 2008 FTIC data board workshop: FTIC 2003 cohort January 2008 report*. Retrieved November 26, 2008, from https://presentations.tcc.fl.edu/BOT/sep08/FTIC_2003CohortReport.aspx#

Another interesting piece of data from the report was the terms to completion data. From the FTIC 2003 cohort, 399 or 23.3% graduated by January 2008. Within this category, only 22.6% graduated in six terms or less, 43.1% required seven to nine terms to graduate, and 34.3% required 10 terms or more to graduate.

While this analysis of the FTIC 2003 cohort was interesting and the level of detail was impressive, it was difficult to make any conclusions other than an alarming 73.9% of the students that began in this cohort did not complete at Tallahassee Community College. The information and statistics included in the reports are intended to be the baseline for tracking improvements and successes in the future. For example, it is intended that similar data will be obtained for the FTIC 2008 cohort, most likely in five years, in order to obtain a similar point in time comparison.

Data Presented at January 2009 Board Workshop

The January 2009 board workshop (TCC, 2009c) was based on a retention comparison between the FTIC 2008 cohort and the baseline FTIC 2003 cohort. One interesting aspect of this presentation was the timeliness of the data; the presentation of spring 2009 enrollment data was presented on January 26, 2009, less than four weeks after the start of classes. Another important factor to note is that the FTIC 2008 cohort of 2,415 students was 41% larger than the FTIC 2003 cohort of 1,712.

Twelve measures and comparisons were presented at the workshop of which five are presented in their entirety in this qualitative analysis section. The remainder of the comparisons is summarized at the end of this section.

As illustrated in Figure 3, the FTIC 2008 cohort was 2,415 students of which 83.7% or 2,021 students were retained compared to 80.8% or 1,282 students retained for the FTIC 2003 cohort. This is a 2.9% increase for FTIC 2008 resulting in the retention of 638 additional students.

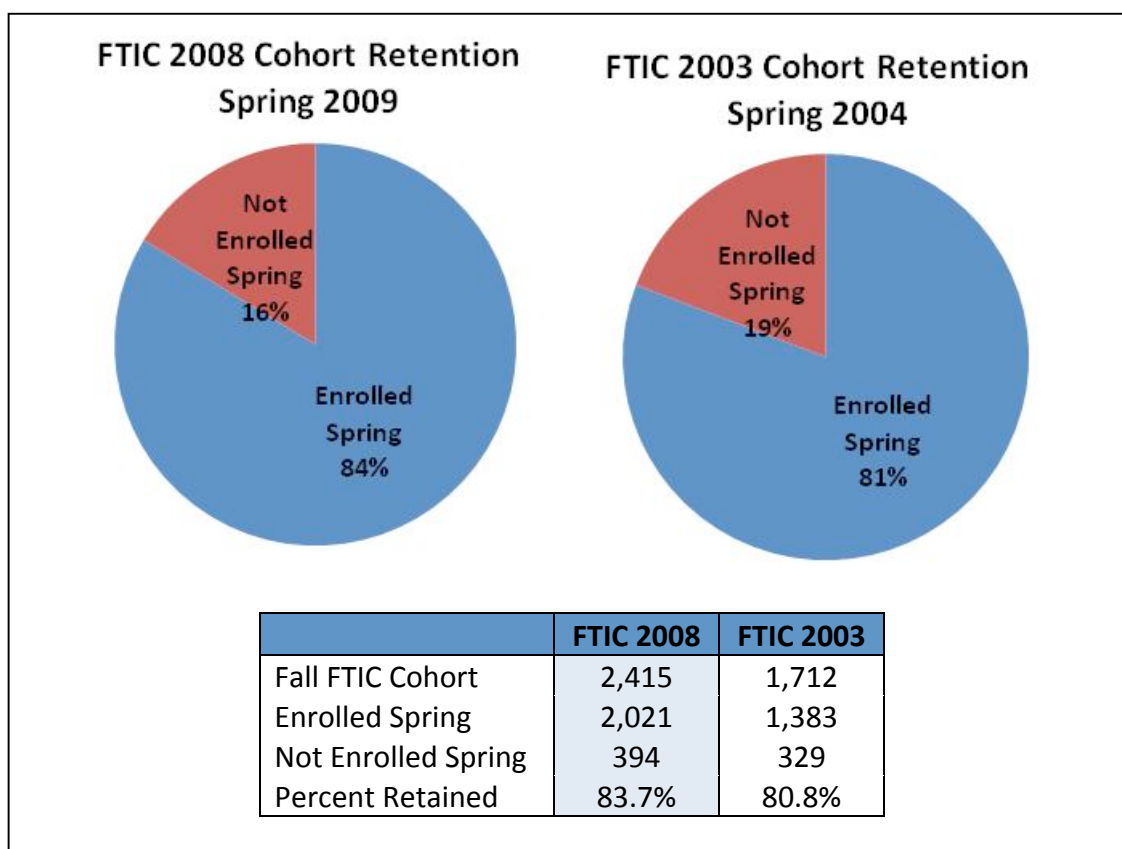


Figure 3. 2003 FTIC and 2008 FTIC retention

Note: Tallahassee Community College [TCC]. (2009c). *January 2009 FTIC 2008 and 2003 comparison charts*. Retrieved March 1, 2009, from <https://presentations.tcc.fl.edu/bot/jan09/FTIC.aspx>

FTIC retention by fall course completion rate, defined as A, B, C, and D grades, is reported in Figure 4. For FTIC 2008, 82.0% of the cohort students who enrolled in spring 2009 completed the fall with A, B, C, and D grades. This is in comparison to a completion rate of 73.6% for the fall 2003, cohort students who enrolled in spring 2004. The early alert and early intervention system were considered to have impacted these results (Interviewee #15).

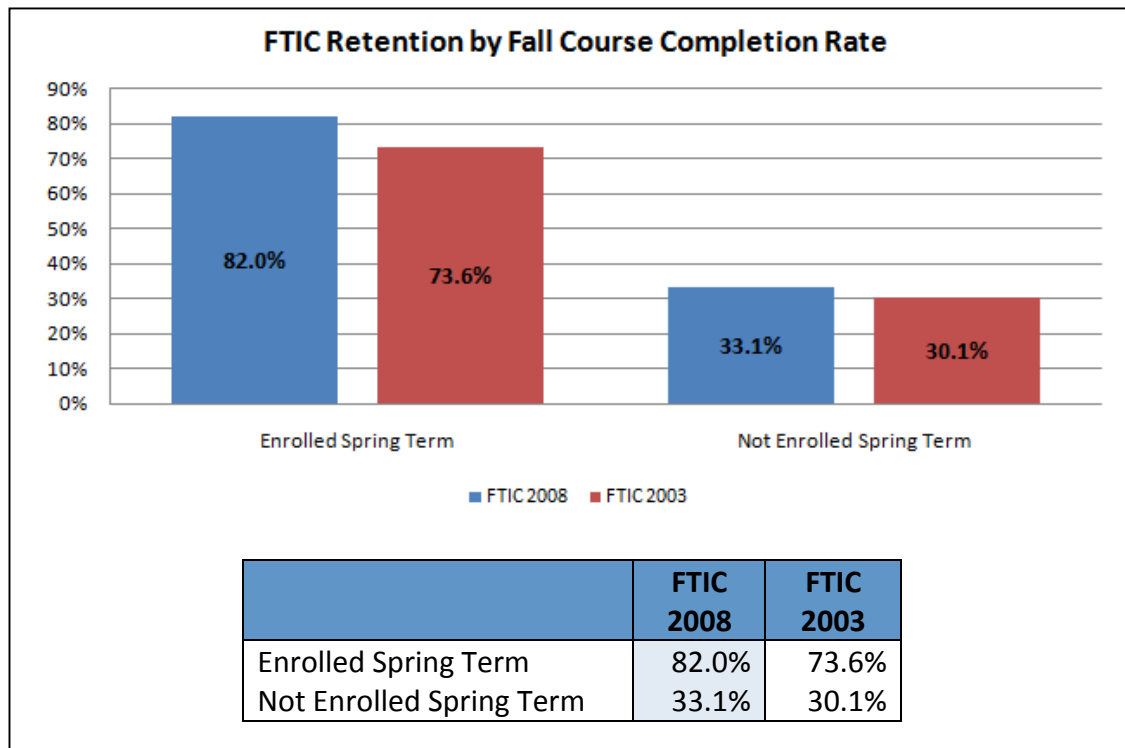


Figure 4. FTIC retention by fall course completion rate

Note: Tallahassee Community College [TCC]. (2009c). *January 2009 FTIC 2008 and 2003 comparison charts*. Retrieved March 1, 2009, from <https://presentations.tcc.fl.edu/bot/jan09/FTIC.aspx>

Presented in Figure 5, is an analysis of the fall grades of both cohorts based on whether or not the student was retained for the subsequent spring semester. For those students from the cohort who enrolled in the spring, 72.4% earned an A, B, and C for the FTIC 2008 cohort compared to 72.7% for the FTIC 2003 cohort. While the FTIC 2008 reported a slight decline of .3%, the actual number of students retained with an A, B, and C increased by 1,872 for 2008 compared to 2003 due to the significant enrollment increase.

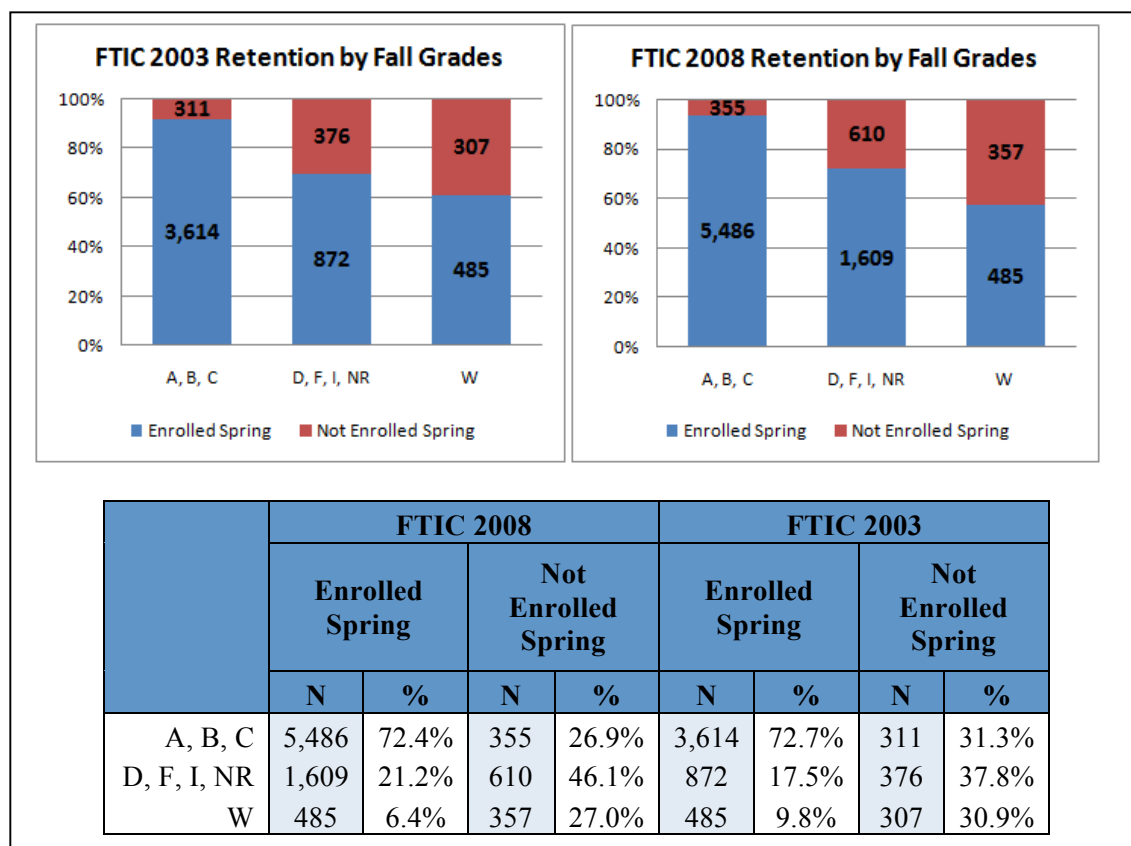


Figure 5. FTIC retention by fall course completion rate

Note: Tallahassee Community College [TCC]. (2009c). *January 2009 FTIC 2008 and 2003 comparison charts*. Retrieved March 1, 2009, from <https://presentations.tcc.fl.edu/bot/jan09/FTIC.aspx>

Average hours withdrawn is reported in Figure 6. Under the principle of ‘students finish what they start,’ a focus is made to reduce the number of withdrawals that students initiate. “The more students withdraw from courses, the less likely they are to persist....that impacts their livelihood to receive financial aid for future semesters. It increases your chances that you are not going to persist term to term” (Interviewee #15). The average hours withdrawn measure captures the number of withdrawals in credit hours. For the FTIC 2008 cohort, 1,859 students or 77.0% of the cohort did not withdraw from any courses. This is an increase in comparison to the 1,196 students or 69.8% of the FTIC 2003 cohort who did not withdraw. Drilling down one additional level, 88.8% of those FTIC 2008 students who were retained to spring 2009 withdrew from zero courses. Again, this is a positive increase over the FTIC 2003 cohort which experienced an 85.8% withdrawal rate. One interviewee attributed this positive trend to “an awareness of educating students about the effects of withdrawals. The student success center began doing a workshop for students on the effects of withdrawing from classes [and] building it into the orientation program from the beginning – just an education piece” (Interviewee #15).

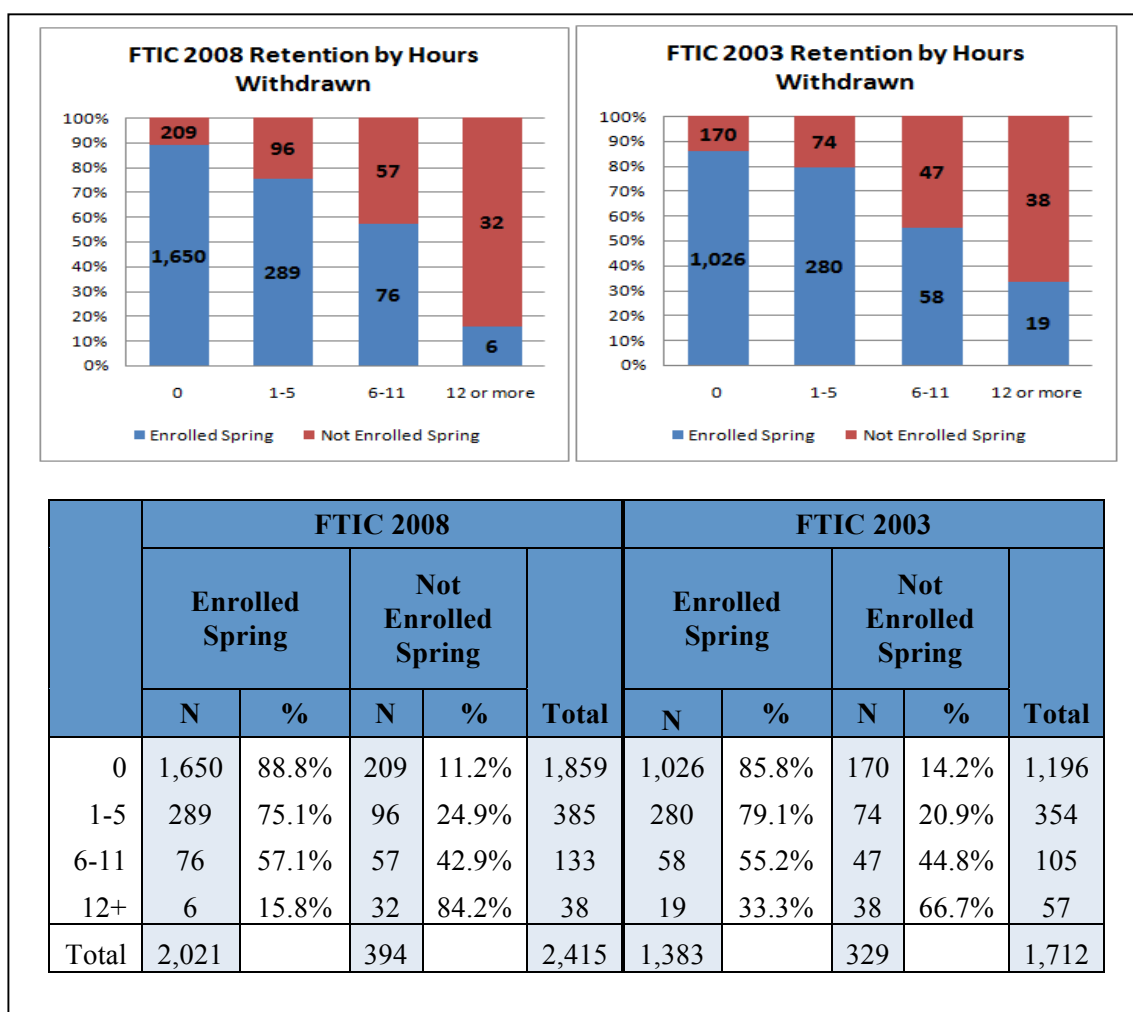


Figure 6. Average hours withdrawn

Note: Tallahassee Community College [TCC]. (2009c). *January 2009 FTIC 2008 and 2003 comparison charts*. Retrieved March 1, 2009, from <https://presentations.tcc.fl.edu/bot/jan09/FTIC.aspx>

In Figure 7, the retention rate of students taking college prep (developmental) courses is reported. For those students taking two or more college prep courses, retention for FTIC 2008 increased 2.4% (from 82.6% for FTIC 2003 to 85.0% for FTIC 2008). Staff attributed this increase largely to the College Success course, which is mandatory

for all FTIC in two or more college prep courses (Interviewee #15). The retention of students requiring only one college prep course experienced a slight decline of .5%. The students retained in any college prep course increased to 82.4% for FTIC 2008 versus 81.5% for FTIC 2003. This represents an increase of 183 students retained for FTIC 2008 over FTIC 2003.

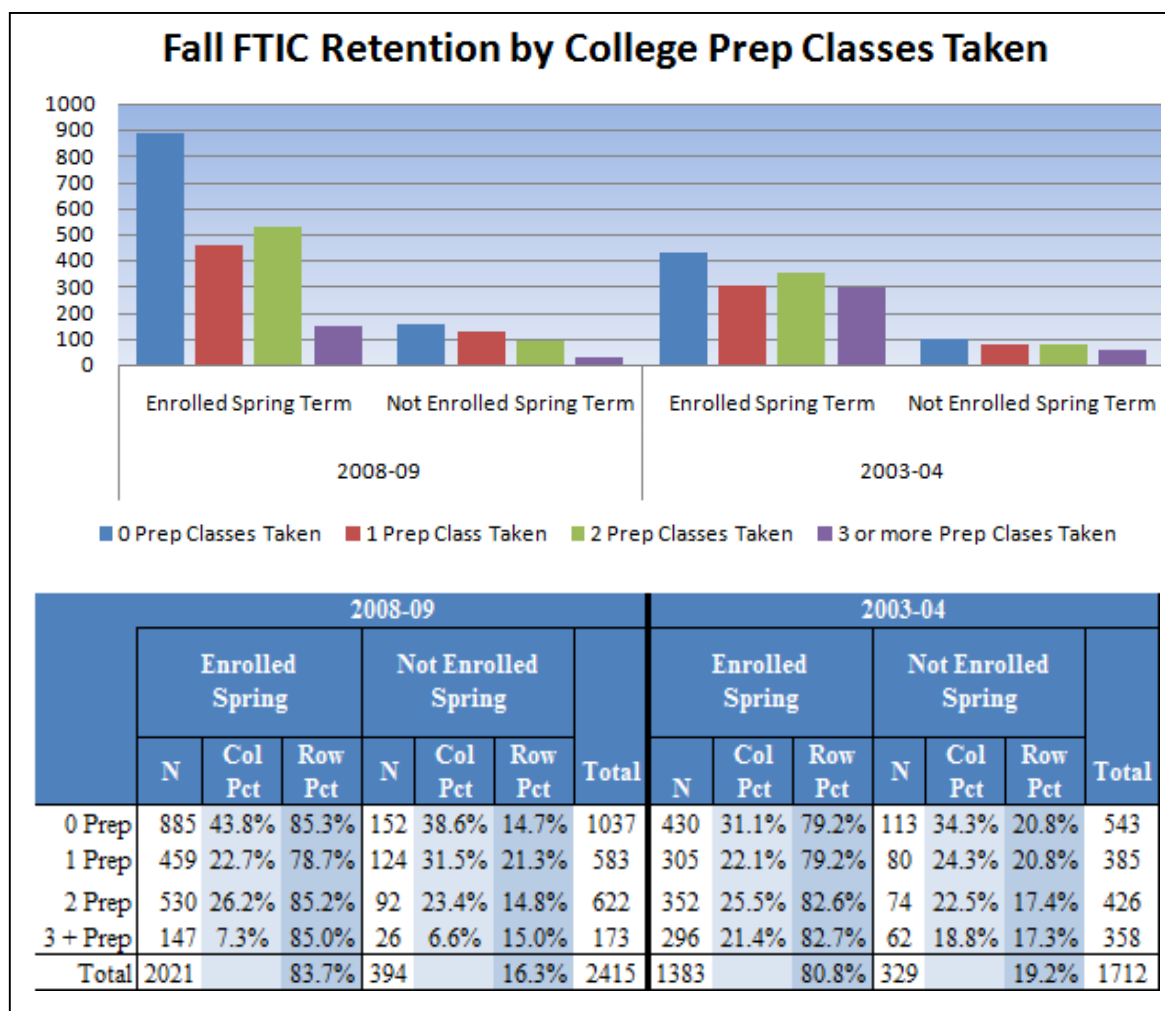


Figure 7. Fall FTIC retention by college prep classes taken

Note: Tallahassee Community College [TCC]. (2009c). *January 2009 FTIC 2008 and 2003 comparison charts*. Retrieved March 1, 2009, from <https://presentations.tcc.fl.edu/bot/jan09/FTIC.aspx>

Several measures were presented that compared the FTIC 2008 retention among gender, ethnicity, enrollment status, district residency, financial aid status, age, and class times. A summary of those measures are presented:

- Eighty-six percent of the females were retained compared to 81% of the males.
- Blacks were retained at a slightly higher percentage than whites (84.7% compared to 83.8%). The lowest retention percentage was in the Hispanic population at 78.0% representing 142 students or 7.0% of the population
- Students enrolled full time were retained at 86.8% compared to 72.9% of part time students.
- Location of district residency reported that out of district students were retained at a higher rate (84.5%) than in district students (82.9%).
- Students on financial aid were retained at 87.2% compared to 74.8% for nonfinancial students.
- The youngest age group (21 and younger), the largest population representing 87.5% of the total cohort, had the highest retention at 85.0%.
- Students enrolled in morning courses had the highest retention at 87.0% versus 84.6% and 79.4% for students taking classes in the afternoon and evening, respectively.

The data presented for FTIC 2008 compared to FTIC 2003 indicates favorable improvements and comparisons in most areas. Especially impressive is the performance between whites and African Americans for FTIC 2008 and the improvement in retention and retention based on fall course completion.

Chapter Summary

The chapter was divided into six sections. In the first section, the researcher reviewed the four research questions and the related subquestions forming the basis of

this study. She also provided an overview of the data collected and how that data was analyzed and organized in response to addressing the research questions.

In section two, the researcher provided a chronological presentation with an overview of the institutional context. Included in this overview was a brief discussion on the institutional history, demographic highlight, budget, and the college's vision, mission, organizational values, and practices. Also included was an overview of the college's strategic plan and organizational framework that provides the general direction and focus of the institution's initiatives and activities.

The third section highlighted the institution's last accreditation and specifically the goals and objectives of its quality enhancement plan (QEP). The goals and objectives of two grant programs, Achieving the Dream and Title III, were reviewed in detail. The initiatives and projects of the QEP and the two grant programs were highlighted to illustrate the alignment and integration of the student success agenda across the institution using multiple funding sources.

In section four, the researcher continued with an analysis qualitative data obtained based largely on site visits to Tallahassee Community College. The majority of this section was dedicated to providing an overview of the interviews conducted for this study. Such presentation was based on eight major themes that emerged through the interview process. Section five focused also on interview responses but was specifically directed to those related to the student portal and the individual learning plans.

Section six provided a review of quantitative data being used by TCC in measuring the success of their work. While the researcher was provided with a multitude of quantitative data, the information presented in this section reflected information reported to the Board of Trustees at board workshops.

This concludes the chapter on findings. The researcher hopes the descriptions and findings provided a thick description of the work being performed at Tallahassee Community College. In Chapter five, interpretations, recommendations, and conclusions are presented based upon these findings.

CHAPTER 5: INTERPRETATIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND CONCLUSIONS

Introduction

The fifth and final chapter of this study is devoted to analyzing the findings and data provided in the previous chapter. An overview of the study is provided, followed by interpretations of the findings in relationship to each research question. Additionally, recommendations are provided in two forms: 1) a recommendation for further research and 2) two recommendations for Tallahassee Community College. The chapter closes with a brief conclusion.

Overview of the Study

In light of global competitiveness, divergent skill distributions among the current and near future workforce, changing demographics, the widening of the gap between rich and poor, the deterioration of the country's educational standings among other industrialized countries, the declining rigor and success of educational institutions, and most recently the economic crisis impacting the United States and the world, community colleges do and will continue to have a critical role in changing and reshaping the future of the United States and its citizens. The work of community colleges can no longer be based on their historical mission on access, but rather it must be based on access **and** success. The overarching goals of this study were twofold: first, to learn how community colleges are preparing students to flourish and contribute to a

changing and global economy, and second, how they address those students that do not make it through the community college.

Within this context, the researcher elected to perform a case study of the Tallahassee Community College (TCC), a college identified as focused on improving student success, empowering students to reach their goals, and committed to sharing data and information across and throughout the institution. To achieve its ultimate goals, this study had four specific purposes. First, it provided an in-depth account of the development and implementation of the organizational vision and student success (learning and attainment) focus at Tallahassee Community College (TCC). Second, the study examined how the use of data provided transparency and redirected the focus of TCC. Third, it examined how the TCC's student learning portal is used by students, faculty, staff, administrators, and the board of trustees. Finally, the findings may inform policy makers, institutional leaders, and researchers about key factors impacting a student success focus. Taken in concert, the study was designed to provide a contextual framework for implementing an organizational vision focused on improving student success.

The study was comprised of the following four primary research questions and issue-oriented supplementary questions:

Research Question 1: What institutional changes and efforts are taking place or have been implemented at TCC to improve student learning and attainment?

- a) What are the shared visions, values, beliefs, or assumptions characterizing the culture of TCC?

b) How have these changed in the recent years?

Research Question 2: How is data used at TCC to focus on student learning and attainment?

a) How is student success measured?

b) How is teaching and learning measured?

c) What data is collected?

d) How is that data collected?

e) What is done with the data that is collected?

f) How does data impact the decision making process?

g) How does the use of data make a difference?

h) What impact has the data had in areas such as operations, budget development, and student outcomes?

Research Question 3: How is the TCC's student learning portal utilized by students, faculty, staff, administrators, and the board of trustees in analyzing and monitoring the progress on student learning and attainment?

Research Question 4: How can the work at TCC inform policy makers, institutional leaders, and researchers regarding key factors impacting a student success focus?

A qualitative research designed case study informed by quantitative data guided this study. The case study was considered the primary methodology, and the use of quantitative data was considered secondary. Tallahassee Community College served as the unit of analysis for the entire case. Additionally, an embedded case study was selected with the unit of analysis defined as the student learning portal. Qualitative methods employed included documents, archival records, interviews, focus group, and

direct observations. The goal of this study was not to represent a sample, but rather to gain an intensive and holistic understanding of Tallahassee Community College.

Interpretations

Tallahassee Community College's (TCC) focus on student success has been featured in several publications, and President Law speaks nationally on the historical strengths and weaknesses of the institution and on its student success agenda. Through these medium, one hears about the transformation occurring at the institution. This case study was designed to provide an in-depth analysis and understanding of the institution's work.

Research Question One

The first research question addressed the institutional changes and efforts that are taking place or have been implemented at TCC to improve student learning and attainment. TCC is an institution whose leadership, the Board of Trustees, President, and executive team, not only understands the importance of a student-centered vision, but they also embrace it. They work actively with faculty and support staff to implement innovative programs, restructure curricula, and provide quality student support services. Additionally, they have put policies in place to ensure that core components of support are mandatory for students rather than optional.

The student success agenda is institutionalized throughout the TCC system, and would in large part continue to thrive absent the college's dynamic and student success minded president, Dr. William (Bill) Law. Another critical component is the active

engagement and commitment of the Board of Trustees to this same agenda. The President and the Board are in concert on the strategic plan and vision for the institution. This agreement is critical and will continue to be critical as the student success agenda continues to progress, especially in light of continued funding reductions from the State of Florida.

The institution has done an excellent job in leveraging resources, receiving grants through Achieving the Dream and Title III to fund initiatives that supplement and support the student success agenda. The projects within these initiatives, along with those of the quality enhancement plan, are aligned with the institution's strategic plan and goals. The strategic plan drives funding through an open and transparent budget development process. The clear alignment and integration among the strategic plan, the budget, and the various initiatives have been amazingly seamless. The results are executable strategies driven by budget and strategic priorities.

While some constituents believe that TCC was beginning to move towards a culture of evidence prior to 2002, it was President Law's sense of urgency and his quest and insistence for data at TCC that caused the divergence. Presenting data from both internal and external sources and having courageous conversations around that data provided eye-opening experiences for the Board of Trustees, administrators, faculties, and staff. The anecdotal stories, while important at times, did not provide the evidence of or lack of evidence of student success. TCC's participation in the Achieving the

Dream initiative provided the conceptual overlap that validated the President's declared student success agenda.

At the present, a culture of evidence and data informed decision making has been established at TCC. Many administrators, faculty, and staff are devoting a significant amount of their personal and collective energies in fulfilling the college mission and monitoring institutional excellence based on the student-centered vision and the commitment to a culture of evidence. In both formal interviews and follow-up conversations with college personnel over the period of several months, employees were more than willing to share their stories, but it was clear that they were juggling many balls. Realizing that long-term impact requires system changes rather than add-on projects, much of the work at TCC has been focused on scalability of promising programs such as the individual learning plans, early alerts, and redesign of development education curriculum.

Research Question Two

The second research question addressed how data is used at TCC to focus on student learning and attainment. 'Data informed decisions' is the mantra at TCC. Decisions are first analyzed on how they meet the strategic priorities of the college, and then they are reviewed based on the supporting data. Managers talk in terms of data, measurement, and effectiveness. Access to data and how it is used has changed the conversations with questions based on: Is it (this program, service, etc.) working and how do we know?

While much of the student data is generated from the college's enterprise resource planning system, managers develop multiple methods of capturing data on services including surveys and learning assessment tests for orientation and check-in systems to monitor tutoring and other uses of academic support at the Learning Commons. Data from the student system was the most critical for most of the users interviewed, and different levels of detail are employed depending on the group. Data presented to the Board of Trustees is at a summary level while mid-level managers analyze details by division, department, and course levels.

The availability of data has made significant progress with the most measurable improvements occurring over the past four years with the hiring of a new Vice President of Information Technology. While numerous enhancements have occurred in the information technology area, the two discussed most often were the data warehouse and portals. The ultimate goal for the data warehouse is to get data out to the users' hands enabling them to generate their own reports and analyses. This is a significant change from the past when data generation was an information technology function. As more dimensions of the data warehouse continue to roll out, users are adequately trained prior to access being granted. The second undertaking, the portals, have been scaled institution-wide with faculty and staff having access to the portals for the Board of Trustees, Faculty and Staff, and Presentations. For the Board of Trustees, the portal has placed easily accessible data and information for review in preparation for workshops, meetings, and for follow-up later. Faculty and staff have access to all three portals in

order to increase transparency and open communications throughout the organization, especially regarding data, strategic priorities, and budget. The Faculty and Staff portal also serves as a collaboration site for committees and departments.

The researcher asked specific questions regarding the measurement of student success and teaching and learning. The student success question generated many responses and multiple calculations were provided. The overarching response was ‘students completing what they start’ or some form of that statement which translates into completion and retention. Measurements included reducing withdrawal rates, increasing completion, and increasing successful completion with an A, B, or C. These measurements are monitored for all coursework and for developmental education; and many are analyzed by ethnic group, gender, and age. Cohort data is tracked for multiple semesters with regular presentations during board workshops. The deans discussed their use of these measures at a department and course level, but they indicated a certain level of sensitivity and caution in how they presented such data to faculty. They referred to the need to look at multiple measures over several semesters in order to make accurate decisions. All of the deans had examples of how the use of data initiated curriculum and programming changes, most recently in the developmental education areas. For student affairs, the measures of success were again tied to retention and completion but with special drill downs to those students who participated in such programs as orientation, the college success course, advising, and early alert.

Quantitative data comparing the performance of the 2003 first time in college (FTIC) cohort to the 2008 FTIC cohort was reviewed as a secondary methodology. This data indicated favorable improvements and comparisons in most areas including retention for general enrollment and college preparation, overall completion, and withdrawals. While the overall completion percentage increased for FTIC 2008 compared to FTIC 2003, the percentage of ABC grades declined slightly from 72.7% to 72.4%, but the overall number of students earning an ABC increased by 1,872. Additionally, the retention by ethnic group reported that the two largest ethnic groups, whites and blacks were retained at 83.8% and 84.7%, respectively.

Questions on how teaching and learning was measured resulted in far fewer responses, delays in most responses, and ‘that’s a hard one’ responses. Discussions proceeded to describe how departments are assessing the adequacy of, and in many cases rewriting, their learning outcomes. Additionally, professional development is being conducted to assist with this endeavor, and it is considered a priority in moving forward. An example of work in this area is the redesign of the academic support division which debuts in fall 2009. Considerable toil was committed in defining clear learning outcomes.

Research Question Three

Research question number three was focused on how TCC’s student portal, known as TCC Passport, was utilized by students, faculty, staff, administrators, and the board of trustees. In order to understand the implications and usage of TCC Passport,

three students were interviewed. In addition, several faculty advisors were interviewed in conjunction with the overall case study of TCC, and supplemental questions were asked to address this research area. TCC Passport is a repository on all college information pertaining to each student plus it houses many resources for students, including My Success and My Career. The individual learning plans are a component of My Success and have been required for students since fall 2006.

Students responded positively about various features of TCC Passport including the academic planner, scheduling features, checklists, and individual learning plans. Each commented about being able to plan their current schedule, their schedule over a couple of semesters, and monitor their degree plan and graduation. Each student noted that these features were especially helpful when meeting with their advisors; furthermore, each acknowledged that having an advisor was important because he/she provided a resource for questions on particular classes, scheduling, degree options, and on general TCC topics. The students also referenced mandatory orientation during their interviews. The features of the orientation that they found most helpful were financial aid, catalog overview, and TCC Passport. One student felt that without the orientation, he/she would not have known about the tools available through TCC Passport.

TCC Passport is used as an advising tool by faculty. Some mentioned that they are still not comfortable with recent changes, but once they access the system they are surprised about the amount of information available on transfers, prerequisites, and departmental notes. TCC Passport is also used to monitor student behaviors and push out

electronic messages including those generated through the early alert system. This feature is under development with incredible potential for “developing mechanisms to track student behavior and refer students to appropriate resources,” (TCC, 2008c, p. 9) and capitalize on strategic engagement actions including customer relations management.

Research Question Four

The last research question is based on how the work at TCC can inform policy makers, institutional leaders, and researchers regarding key factors impacting a student success focus. TCC has a success story to tell about how the institution has been transformed to focus on student success. In fact, TCC offers a strong national model for community colleges desiring to move towards this agenda and looking at performance numbers. Even more importantly, very few institutions can afford not to commit to the student success agenda. In this final section, the researcher offers some general recommendations for institutionalizing a student success agenda at community colleges. These recommendations are drawn largely from the work accomplished at TCC, but supplemented by the literature review conducted for this study and the researcher’s personal experience as an administrator engaged in developing a student success agenda at another institution.

It is important to note that in driving a student success agenda at a community college or at any institution requires collaboration between the president, other members of the administrative leadership team, faculty members, support staff, and the Board of

Trustees. This is not work that can be accomplished in isolation. It requires institution-wide commitment. Nor will this work be accomplished quickly. It requires patience, persistence, hard work, and courageous conversations. And it must be supported with data to challenge the anecdotal observations that have generated many of the success stories in the past. These are the actions that have gotten TCC to its current stature in 2009.

There is no clear starting point on this work but sharing the data is a critical first step. It allows the status quo to be challenged. This was a critical step in the journey experienced by TCC.

A Recommendation for Further Research

The first recommendation is for future research. Tallahassee Community College (TCC) has many initiatives that are under development or not fully implemented. This is not unusual for an organization that is going through transformation and multiple change initiatives, and for an organization that operates under the continuous improvement methodology. Examples of such projects are the early alert system, student service reorganization, and roll-out of the academic support redesign along with several information technology projects including the data warehousing projects, the continued enhancements of TCC Passport, and eventually data mining. Additionally, the assessment of the impact of the individual learning plans on student success and attainment is an area that is in its preliminary stages. As these projects progress it would be beneficial to conduct another study of TCC to see how student success results are

being impacted with a focus to ensure that the sample is representative of the student population. A way to monitor this progress would be to conduct a study when the FTIC 2008 cohort data has been tracked for five years through January 2013 and summer 2013. This timeline would be consistent with the tracking that has been performed on FTIC 2003 cohort and would provide a baseline for the researcher.

A second area for research consideration would be to understand how Tallahassee Community College addresses what President Law calls, 'TCC 2.0.' For his institution and for community colleges in general, he was quite concerned about what the future holds and how we, community colleges, would meet the needs of those future students:

We really have moved to the front of 'my job is to help more students succeed.' I think that's going to be in place but I need to make sure that is firmly rooted. We have to get our arms around what we call TCC 2.0. I don't know what it means but we've got to be much more adept at distance learning and out of class support and the modern world kind of stuff. We'll wake up one day and we'll be left at the station. I'm really nervous about that. It's a really hard dialogue, even for Achieving the Dream [and] self-regarding schools.... That's what the faculty is really nervous about and I can't help them [be]cause I don't know what it means. I can't even relieve their anxieties. Every time I say something it raises their anxieties but if I stop talking about it that doesn't mean it doesn't exist. (personal communication, March 3, 2009)

The researcher agrees with President Law's concern and is anxious to see how they begin to address this issue.

Institutional Recommendations

The researcher's work clearly indicates that Tallahassee Community College (TCC) has experienced a transformational change, and periodically, with change and newness comes confusion and misunderstanding. It is in this realm that the researcher is providing two recommendations to TCC. The first is regarding the faculty and staff portal and the second is regarding the student portal.

TCC has provided a wealth of information to its faculty and staff as part of its efforts for instilling transparency, open communications, and collaboration. One comment that was heard from several interviewees was the untidiness of the faculty and staff portal, and the difficulty in finding information on it. There were references from some interviewees that it was becoming overbearing with information. While not a trend, in some cases it appears that the portal is not updated on a timely basis, but rather is updated when information is requested. It is recommended that processes to structure the information around the faculty and staff portal be developed. It will be important that the processes allow for much flexibility and are not too restrictive.

Additionally, faculty interviewees noted that a significant portion of the faculty is not accessing the opportunities afforded by the portal in obtaining information. While the researcher did not assess the volume of non-users, it may be appropriate for TCC to assess this number. If significant, TCC may want to conduct focus groups or distribute surveys in order to capture issues and concerns regarding the portal. Such an assessment

is recommended since the faculty and staff portal is used as a communication tool, and if there is confusion around how to use it or how to retrieve information, then the tool may not be working as effectively as anticipated.

The second recommendation is in response to the comments from the student interviewees regarding the student portal. One student suggested that the information on TCC Passport was at times overbearing and just too much. He/she felt that some simplification was needed. The other two students suggested that they would like to receive more feedback from faculty and TCC Passport could provide a possible option. While the comments from these students represent a very small portion of TCC's student population, it is recommended that they be given consideration, possibly through larger student focus groups, as TCC continues to enhance TCC Passport.

Conclusion

This case study has provided the researcher with a rich learning experience that will serve her well in her career in community college leadership. Tallahassee Community College is an intriguing example of how one institution has addressed and moved the needle on improving student success. Merriam (2002c) described the case study process as a journey, and possibly a struggle. He said for this reason, it is crucial to study a phenomenon that you are *really* curious about, that you care about, [and] that you are passionate about" (p. 423). These criteria applied to the researcher and the phenomenon selected for this case study, Tallahassee Community College, at the beginning of this quest. But these criteria are even more germane now than when the

work began. The researcher believed and continues to believe that the unique story of Tallahassee Community College should be documented and shared with others. She only hopes that her descriptions and analysis have given the story the justice that it so rightly deserves.

APPENDIX A

Example Senior Leader and Non-Student Interview Protocol Tallahassee Community College

Adapted from: Mathis, M. B. (2006). *Institutional transformation and learning at The Community College of Baltimore County: A case study and systems perspective*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Texas at Austin. (Publication No. AAT 3244351).

Purpose of study:

Identify and describe the critical factors contributing to the successful transformation of Tallahassee Community College (TCC) to strengthen student success (learning and attainment).

What are the key factors at TCC that contributed to the change in college focus on improved student success (learning and attainment)?

- What is/was the impetus for change?
- What were the critical variables (internal/external) that contributed to the effort to promote institutional transformation?
- What were the trigger events?
- What were the sources of perceived need for change? For you? For others in the institution?
- Please describe the key elements of the process of institutional transformation at TCC.

Leadership:

- How were you prepared for this undertaking?
- Please describe the values and vision you have worked to instill or have seen other leaders instill at TCC.
- Please describe the core strategic direction of TCC.
- What were the motivations in you or others to initiate a student success focus?
- What motivated you to provide leadership in the student success focus?
- As you reflect on insights gained related to the changes at TCC, what did you learn about leadership from this experience? What recommendations do you offer?

People:

- What special strategies were used to get people involved?
- How did was ownership by the faculty developed? By other stakeholders?
- How are people reacting to the transformation and focus on student success?

Data and the Culture of Evidence:

- How was and is data used to inform decisions?
- What would you describe as the key steps in building “a culture of evidence”?
- How are data used in planning and aligning priorities and budgets?
- What was the role of the Achieving the Dream initiative on this focus?
- Were there other programs within the institution that enhanced this focus?
- What has been the role of the student portal and learning plans?

Board Roles and Relationships:

- What do you see as key roles of the Board of Trustees in building a learning-focused institution?
- What do you see as key roles of the Board of Trustees in closing the achievement gap?
- In what ways will the sustainability of the learning-focused transformational effort remain after the president leaves (i.e. has the student success agenda been institutionalized)?

Change and Resistance to Change:

- There is always resistance to change, especially change of the magnitude that has been instilled at TCC. Please describe the primary sources of resistance, share your view of the reasons for it, and describe how you have dealt with the resistance.
- What are key barriers to institutional change at TCC?
- What key lessons about institutional change have you learned from the TCC experience?

It is my sincere pleasure to be here to document the success of the TCC journey. Thank you for allowing me this opportunity.

APPENDIX B

Student Interview Protocol Tallahassee Community College

Purpose of study:

Identify and describe the critical factors contributing to the successful transformation of Tallahassee Community College (TCC) to strengthen success (learning and attainment).

Student Portal & Learning Plans:

- How are you using the student portal and learning plans offered by TCC?
- Please describe how their use has impacted your educational decisions and goals.
- What benefits have you received by using either or both of these tools?
- What challenges are you still encountering on your educational continuum?
- What recommendations do you offer for improvement or changes?
- Is there an avenue available for you to offer comments about the learning plans and student portal?

People:

- What people at TCC have helped you with your educational goals and success?
- Do you feel that people at TCC are really interested in you being successful?
- Do you have an advisor? If so, how have they assisted you?

Data and the Culture of Evidence:

- How do you use the data provided by the student portal and learning plans to make informed decisions?
- How do you use the data for planning?
- How else do you use the data?
- What other sources do you have for obtaining data that is important to you? And what type of data does that cover?

Other:

- How do you define your own student success?
- What other initiatives or programs at TCC have helped you achieve success?
- What other comments that you would like to add?

It is my sincere pleasure to be here to document the success of the TCC journey and your personal journal. Thank you for allowing me this opportunity.

APPENDIX C

CONSENT FORM

Title: An Institutional Focus on Student Learning and Attainment: A Case Study of Tallahassee Community College

IRB PROTOCOL #2009-01-0011

Conducted By: Brenda Lang Hellyer, Doctoral Student, Community College Leadership Program (CCLP), Higher Education Administration Office, The University of Texas at Austin, 832-276-3718

Faculty Sponsor: Dr. John E. Roueche, Community College Leadership Program (CCLP), Higher Education Administration Office, The University of Texas at Austin, 512-232-6226

You are being asked to participate in a research study. This form provides you with information about the study. The person in charge of this research will also describe this study to you and answer all of your questions. Please read the information below and ask any questions you might have before deciding whether or not to take part. Your participation is entirely voluntary. You can refuse to participate without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You can stop your participation at any time and your refusal will not impact current or future relationships with UT Austin or participating sites. To do so simply tell the researcher you wish to stop participation. The researcher will provide you with a copy of this consent for your records.

The purpose of this study is to research the key factors at Tallahassee Community College (TCC) that contribute to student success (learning and attainment) of all students. The overall goal of the study is to provide a contextual framework for implementing an organizational vision focused on improving student success.

The research questions and supplemental questions for this study are:

Research Question 1: What institutional changes and efforts are taking place or have been implemented at TCC to improve student learning and attainment?

- a) What are the shared visions, values, beliefs, or assumptions characterizing the culture of TCC?
- b) How have these changed in the recent years?

Research Question 2: How is data used at TCC to focus on student learning and attainment?

- a) How is student success measured?
- b) How is teaching and learning measured?

- c) What data is collected?
- d) How is that data collected?
- e) What is done with the data that is collected?
- f) How does data impact the decision making process?
- g) How does the use of data make a difference?
- h) What impact has the data had in areas such as operations, budget development, and student outcomes?

Research Question 3: How is TCC's student learning portal utilized by students, faculty, staff, administrators, and the board of trustees in analyzing and monitoring the progress on student learning and attainment?

Research Question 4: How can the work at TCC inform policy makers, institutional leaders, and researchers regarding key factors impacting a student success focus?

If you agree to be in this study, we will ask you to do the following things:

- Participate in an in-depth interview or focus group with the researcher pertaining to the study. The in-depth interview or focus group will be scheduled during office hours at TCC. The interviews or focus groups are scheduled during the months of January and March 2009. Focus group participants will consist of students attending TCC. Interview participants will include members of the Board of Trustees, Leadership Team, and members of the staff and faculty who are involved with the TCC student success initiatives.

Total estimated time to participate in study is approximately 90 minutes per person.

Risks:

- The risk associated with this study is no greater than everyday life.
- Practices will be implemented to assure confidentiality; however, a possible risk involves the loss of confidentiality.
- If you wish to discuss the information above or any other risks you may experience, you may ask questions now or call the Principal Investigator listed on the front page of this form.

Benefits:

- The potential benefit to the study is to identify critical elements of transformational leadership, institutional effectiveness, and institutional and student learning, that could contribute to knowledge that is useful to other community colleges and parties associated with community colleges such as policy makers.

Compensation:

- No compensation will be provided.

Confidentiality and Privacy Protections:

- Participation in this study will include an audio or video recording of the session. Tapes will be coded so that no personally identifying information is available on them; tapes will be kept in a secure place (i.e. a locked file cabinet in the investigator's office); tapes

will be heard or viewed only for research purposes by the investigator and his or her associates unless prior written consent is obtained; and tapes will be retained in a secure place for possible future analysis.

- The data resulting from your participation may be made available to other researchers in the future for research purposes not detailed within this consent form. In these cases, the data will contain no identifying information that could associate you with it, or with your participation in any study ***unless written approval is obtained*** from individual focus group or interview participants to include quotes attributable to individual(s). Please see signature lines below.

The records of this study will be stored securely and kept confidential. Authorized persons from The University of Texas at Austin, members of the Institutional Review Board, and (study sponsors, if any) have the legal right to review your research records and will protect the confidentiality of those records to the extent permitted by law. All publications will exclude any information that will make it possible to identify you as a subject unless written approval is obtained from individual focus group or interview participants to include quotes attributable to individual(s). Throughout the study, the researchers will notify you of new information that may become available and that might affect your decision to remain in the study.

Contacts and Questions:

If you have any questions about the study please ask now. If you have questions later, want additional information, or wish to withdraw your participation call the researchers conducting the study. My name, phone number, and e-mail address are as follows: Brenda Lang Hellyer; phone: 832-276-3718; email: blhelyer@mail.utexas.edu.

If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, complaints, concerns, or questions about the research please contact Jody Jensen, Ph.D., Chair, The University of Texas at Austin Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects at (512) 232-2685 or the Office of Research Support at (512) 471-8871 or email: orsc@uts.cc.utexas.edu.

You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records.

Statement of Consent:

I have read the above information and have sufficient information to make a decision about participating in this study. I consent to participate in the study.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent Date: _____

Signature of Investigator: _____ Date: _____

We may wish to present some of the tapes from this study at scientific conventions or as demonstrations in classrooms. Please sign below if you are willing to allow us to do so with your tape.

I hereby give permission for the video (audio) tape made for this research study to be also used for educational purposes.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

We may wish to include some of your quotes from the focus group(s) and/or interviews with the researcher in publications, at conventions, or as demonstrations in classrooms. Please sign below if you are willing to allow us to include your quotes and attribute them to you.

I hereby give permission my quotes from the focus group(s) and/or interviews to be also used in publications, at conventions, or as demonstrations in classrooms.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

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VITA

Brenda Lang Hellyer was born and raised in Hays, Kansas. She is the daughter of Ronald and Patricia Lang. In 1982, she graduated from Hays High School. In May 1985, she graduated summa cum laude from Fort Hays State University with a Bachelor of Science degree in Accounting. That same May, she sat and passed the Certified Public Accountants (CPA) examination. She began her accounting career in Denver, Colorado where she worked for a national public accounting firm and a Fortune 500 mining company. In 1991, Brenda moved to Houston, Texas for a one-year assignment to liquidate savings and loans in conjunction with the work of the Resolution Trust Corporation. During this assignment she met her husband, Rusty Hellyer and realized Texas would be her home for a few years to come. During the next few years, Rusty and Brenda opened, operated, and eventually sold several successful automotive businesses.

Brenda's involvement with community colleges began in 1996 when she began serving as an inaugural director for the San Jacinto College Foundation. In 2000, Brenda accepted the position of Executive Vice President for Resource Development at San Jacinto College District (SJCD), a multi-campus community college located in Pasadena, Texas. In 2003, she was appointed as Vice Chancellor of Fiscal Affairs and served as the Chief Financial Officer for SJCD for five years. In each of these positions, Brenda reported directly to the Chancellor and worked closely with the Board of Trustees to both raise and manage funds for the College. Her most recent position has

been as Executive Vice Chancellor and in May 2009, she will assume the position of Chancellor.

Brenda has continued to pursue her educational goals including earning a Master of Business Administration degree from the University of Texas in Austin in 2005 and nearing completion of an Ed.D. in Educational Administration, Community College Leadership from the University of Texas at Austin. She has completed the American Association of Community College's Future Leader's Institute, the Council for Resource Development's Specialist Training, and the League of Innovation's Executive Leadership Institute.

Brenda has also served and continues to serve on a variety of community boards and committees including chambers of commerce, economic development councils, city and county government, and non-profit organizations. She participates in many fundraising activities and her duties are varied but best described as "whatever it takes to get the job done."

Brenda has also been instrumental in several initiatives to increase the operating efficiency of SJCD through the development of a performance management system for staff and faculty, development of a facility master plan, reaccreditation of the college in November of 2008, assisted in obtaining and implementing an Achieving the Dream grant to help students succeed in college, and assisted with implementation of a college-wide reorganization. Brenda is committed to the student success agenda and continues to

work towards removing barriers and developing support systems that increase both access and success while ensuring excellence.

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This manuscript was typed by the author.